

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF J.K. ROWLING

Growing up in rural England, Rowling enjoyed writing fantasy stories and reading aloud to her younger sister, Dianne. She studied French and Classics at the University at Exeter but remained ambivalent about these subjects, preferring to read authors like Dickens and Tolkien. Rowling conceived of the Harry Potter universe shortly after graduating and immediately began writing; her mother's death after years of battling multiple sclerosis informed her portrayal of Harry's grief for his lost parents. However, life got in the way before she finished the first book. While teaching English in Portugal, Rowling got married and gave birth to her first child, but the marriage soon dissolved and she moved to Edinburgh. Unable to get a job, she struggled to raise her daughter on welfare benefits while also fighting depression and working on her book. With the success of the Harry Potter franchise, Rowling's life transformed: she became a household name and the world's first billionaire author, although she has since given much of her fortune to charity. She has since married Neil Murray, a Scottish doctor, with whom she has two younger children.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Half-Blood Prince is the second Harry Potter novel written after the September 11th attack on New York's World Trade Center. For America and the UK, the events of 9/11 ushered in an era of anxiety about extremist ideology and caused people to question the government's ability to combat these new threats, especially after long and deadly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan miserably failed to eradicate terrorism as promised. In the novel, these anxieties are reflected in the Ministry of Magic's incompetence and corruption as it tries to respond to Voldemort, as well as Harry's growing realization that no authority figures are able to stand between him and Voldemort. Because of their obsession with "pureblood" wizards and hatred of wizards with Muggle ancestry, Voldemort and his Death Eaters have often been compared to the Nazis, who used narratives of racial purity to justify their actions. However, Rowling doesn't just focus on prejudice displayed by extremists but also shows how it plays a part in mainstream Wizarding society as well. In *Half-Blood Prince*, disregard for the narratives of house-elves prevents the Ministry from learning crucial information about Voldemort's past; meanwhile, the stigma and ostracism that Wizarding society places on werewolves drives this marginalized minority to side with Voldemort.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

After finishing the Harry Potter series, Rowling wrote a number of books meant to expand knowledge of the Wizarding World. *Quidditch Through the Ages*, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, and *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* all correspond to books used or mentioned in the series and give detailed information on the sport of Quidditch, various magical creatures, and Wizarding folklore. Rowling's play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, which details the exploits of Harry's son Albus, draws on the universe that Rowling creates in her original series. Rowling herself credits J.R.R. Tolkien as an important literary influence; like Rowling, he creates an extensive and well thought-out alternate universe and portrays the clash between good and evil forces in his saga *Lord of the Rings*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*
- **When Written:** 2005
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 2005
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Fantasy
- **Setting:** Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, England
- **Climax:** Snape kills Dumbledore
- **Antagonist:** Lord Voldemort
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Bestseller. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* sold nine million copies in the 24 hours after its release, shattering previous records for bestsellers.

Moonlighting. In an effort to escape her literary fame, Rowling wrote several detective novels under the pseudonym of Robert Galbraith.



PLOT SUMMARY

Cornelius Fudge visits the Muggle Prime Minister to discuss the return of Lord Voldemort and the recent spate of disasters, affecting both Muggles and wizards, that he's caused. Fudge reveals that he's been pushed out of office for his inability to contain the Dark wizard and introduces his new successor, the tough and brusque Rufus Scrimgeour.

In another part of England, Narcissa Malfoy clandestinely visits Severus Snape, reluctantly accompanied by her sister Bellatrix. Narcissa begs Snape to aid her son Draco with a mysterious task the Dark Lord has assigned him, and Snape agrees. When Bellatrix questions the wisdom of trusting him, Snape explains how he's served Voldemort over the years and that he's been acting as a spy for his entire time at Hogwarts.

Meanwhile, Dumbledore picks Harry up from the Dursleys', where he's been mourning his godfather Sirius's recent death. He takes Harry with him to persuade an old colleague, Horace Slughorn, to come out of retirement and teach at Hogwarts. Slughorn is clearly attracted by Harry's fame and mystique, and Dumbledore warns him not to be "collected" by the wily professor. Before dropping Harry off at the Burrow, Dumbledore announces that he'll be giving him private lessons this year and warns him that the Weasleys have received special Ministry security for his protection, and that he must be especially careful about his safety. Harry spends the rest of the summer at the Burrow with Ron and Hermione, but their time together is marred by news of death and disturbance brought by other members of the Order of the Phoenix.

While buying school supplies at Diagon Alley, Harry, Ron, and Hermione encounter Draco Malfoy and clandestinely follow him to the seedy secondhand store Borgin and Burkes, where he speaks with the owner Borgin about repairing a mysterious object and threatens him with unknown consequences if he's unable to accomplish the task. Harry is convinced that Malfoy has become a Death Eater, but the others don't believe him. On the Hogwarts Express, Harry eavesdrops on Malfoy bragging about serving Voldemort, but Malfoy catches him, breaks his nose, and traps him in a train compartment, making him late to the school's first banquet.

To Harry's surprise and horror, Dumbledore announces that the new Professor Slughorn will be teaching Potions, while Snape will get the job he's always coveted – Defense Against the Dark Arts. All the sixth-years are overwhelmed by this year's workload, but Harry is assisted in Potions by a mysterious secondhand textbook he finds in the classroom, which is filled with annotations from a student called the "Half-Blood Prince." Despite Hermione's manifest disapproval, the Prince's notes help Harry become an expert potion-maker. This increases Slughorn's fascination with him and the professor continually invites him and Hermione to special parties in his office, while conspicuously ignoring Ron. At the same time, Harry is made Captain of the Quidditch team. While the blustering and arrogant Cormac McLaggen tries out for Ron's position as Keeper, he's foiled by Hermione, who discreetly Confunds him from the stands.

Harry expects to be learning complicated defensive magic in his lessons with Dumbledore, but instead the headmaster uses the Pensieve to show him various memories he's collected, illuminating Voldemort's family history and youth. Over many

sessions, Harry learns that Voldemort comes from the Gaunt family, who were once wealthy and prestigious but descended into poverty and mental instability. In the Pensieve he sees Voldemort's grandfather, Marvolo, and uncle, Morfin, terrorize his mother, Merope; Dumbledore explains that after the two men are now imprisoned in Azkaban. Merope uses her magic to cast a love charm over a Muggle with whom she's in love, Tom Riddle Sr. After they are married and she gets pregnant, she lifts the charm, hoping that he's developed real feelings for her, but he abandons her and she dies of despair shortly after giving birth to their son. Harry witnesses Dumbledore retrieve the young Tom Riddle from the orphanage where he grew up and where the matron reveals his strange abilities and sadistic tendencies. Harry also sees a partially-observed memory of Professor Slughorn's in which Riddle asks the professor for information about Horcruxes. Dumbledore explains that Slughorn has tampered with the memory in order to avoid revealing an act of which he's ashamed, and charges Harry to extract the real memory from him.

Meanwhile, a series of disturbing events are threatening the safety of students at Hogwarts. A member of the Gryffindor Quidditch team, Katie Bell, is placed under the Imperius Curse by an unknown person and charged to deliver a strange package to Hogwarts. When she accidentally touches the cursed necklace inside, she almost dies and spends several months at St. Mungo's Hospital. Shortly thereafter, Ron accidentally ingests a love potion that Romilda Vane intended to use on Harry. Professor Slughorn mixes an antidote and then offers Ron a glass of mead, but the drink turns out to be poisoned, and only through Harry's quick action is Ron saved. Harry is sure that Draco and Snape are behind these failed plots, but Ron and Hermione are unconvinced, and when Harry voices his speculations to Dumbledore and McGonagall they reprimand him for making accusations without evidence.

While all of this is occurring, the trio of friends face new romantic challenges. Ron and Hermione seem to be taking a new interest in each other and she wants to invite him to Slughorn's Christmas party, but Ron is frustrated by the professor's lack of regard for him and picks a fight with Hermione. Hermione takes Cormac McLaggen, Ron's Quidditch competitor, to the party instead and Ron starts dating Lavender Brown, whose public displays of affection annoy Harry and hurt Hermione deeply. Meanwhile, Harry and Ron encounter Ginny and Dean Thomas kissing in a corridor. Ron accuses his sister of behaving inappropriately and she explodes, reminding him that he has no business trying to control her love life. Harry realizes that he has feelings for Ginny, but is afraid to act on them after seeing how Ron reacted to Dean.

With so much going on in his life Harry neglects to secure Slughorn's memory and is reprimanded by Dumbledore for not giving his full attention to such an important task. Ashamed, he

drinks a bottle of Felix Felicis, a luck potion he won earlier in a Potions contest. Guided by temporary luck, Harry attends the acromantula Aragog's funeral at Hagrid's cabin, encountering Slughorn on the way and bringing him along. Slughorn and Hagrid get extremely drunk and Harry capitalizes on his sentimental mood to persuade him that revealing the memory would be a heroic act. Once he's obtained the memory, Harry rushes to Dumbledore's office, where they view Slughorn telling Riddle about [Horcruxes](#), a kind of Dark magic that enables a wizard to split his soul and achieve immortality. Dumbledore hypothesizes that Voldemort has created several Horcruxes and hidden them in various places; it's imperative to destroy them so that, once defeated, Voldemort will never be able to rise again.

Still suspicious of Draco despite Dumbledore's reassurances, Harry begins stalking him around the castle. One day he encounters his rival sobbing in a bathroom and confiding in a ghost, Moaning Myrtle, that he fears Voldemort will kill his family if he doesn't accomplish some task. When Draco catches sight of Harry, they begin dueling and Harry uses an unknown spell from his Potions textbook which turns out to slash Draco's body, almost killing him. In retaliation, Snape gives Harry detention every Saturday, meaning he has to miss the Gryffindor Quidditch final. Everyone is angry with him, but the team still manages to win the game; in the celebratory aftermath, Harry kisses Ginny in the common room and they begin dating, with Ron's reluctant approval.

Harry spends several weeks enjoying his new relationship with Ginny before Dumbledore tells him that he's deciphered the location of one of Voldemort's Horcruxes and invites him to come on the mission to destroy it. The two Apparate to a remote seaside cave, where Dumbledore uncovers the entrance to a hidden lake. Rowing out to an island in the center, they find a Horcrux – the locket of Slytherin – lying in a basin of liquid. Dumbledore is forced to drink the potion, which weakens him physically and causes him to hallucinate unknown but terrifying delusions. Harry has to spearhead their retreat across the lake, which turns out to be filled with Inferi, or enchanted dead bodies. Supporting Dumbledore, he leaves the cave and Apparates to Hogsmeade, where Madam Rosmerta is awake and points out that the Dark Mark has appeared over Hogwarts – meaning that there are Death Eaters inside.

Borrowing brooms from Rosmerta, Harry and Dumbledore fly to the Astronomy Tower, which is closest to the mark. Dumbledore immobilizes Harry, who is under his Invisibility Cloak, protecting the teenager but leaving himself more vulnerable. Soon Draco emerges onto the ramparts and announces his intention to kill Dumbledore. He reveals that he's been charged with this task by Voldemort and that he's behind the cursed necklace and poisoned mead. Despite his bravado, he seems scared and uncertain, and Dumbledore urges him to switch sides, promising to protect him and his

family. Several other Death Eaters come into view, among them Snape; the professor raises his wand at Dumbledore and kills him.

Released from Dumbledore's spell with his death, Harry runs downstairs in pursuit of Snape. When he repeatedly tries to curse him, the professor taunts him and reveals that he is actually the Half-Blood Prince. Then he Disapparates and escapes, along with Draco. Members of the Order of the Phoenix have arrived and dispatched the other Death Eaters, and Harry runs to the hospital wing where they are gathered, grieving Dumbledore's death and caring for Bill Weasley, who has been mauled by the werewolf Fenrir Greyback. Seeing how devoted Fleur is to her fiancé, Mrs. Weasley reconciles with her future daughter-in-law.

After Dumbledore's death and the new security breach, Hogwarts' future is uncertain, but all the students stay for the headmaster's funeral. The entire Wizarding community descends on campus for the event, which is also attended by magical creatures like merpeople and centaurs, with whom Dumbledore cultivated good relations. Harry feels numb throughout the ceremonies. He realizes that no adult can protect him from Voldemort, and it was a foolish illusion ever to have relied on authority figures. After the funeral he breaks up with Ginny, telling her that he doesn't want the Death Eaters to use her to get to him. She doesn't want him to protect her, but ultimately accepts his choice.

Harry tells Ron and Hermione that even if Hogwarts reopens, he's going to leave school and search for the Horcruxes. He anticipates making this journey alone, but his friends immediately vow to accompany him. Ron tells him that before setting off, they have to return to the Burrow and celebrate Bill and Fleur's wedding. Harry feels slightly cheered to know that even in this new era of instability, positive things like weddings can still happen. Even though the path ahead is treacherous, he's bolstered by the thought that he'll be traveling it with his two best friends.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Harry Potter – The novel's protagonist, a teenaged wizard studying at Hogwarts and fighting the evil Lord Voldemort. Harry has been an orphan since his parents, Lily and James, were murdered by Lord Voldemort during his infancy; he has a poor relationship with Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon, who raised him, and relies on his friends Ron and Hermione, as well as the Weasley family, for support and a sense of family. Because of his background and numerous encounters with Voldemort, Harry has become famous and admired by the Wizarding community. One of his most endearing qualities is his aversion to public attention and disregard for social status;

more popular than ever in *Half-Blood Prince*, Harry stays close to people with whom he has genuine and loyal relationships, like Neville and Luna. Guided by a strong sense of right and wrong, Harry is always ready to take action when he sees something bad happening, but he can be overzealous in his pursuit of justice, and is often reluctant to acknowledge that people can have aspects of both good and evil at the same time. In *Half-Blood Prince*, Harry has to seriously grapple with romance for the first time, as he nurses a crush on Ginny Weasley but fears upsetting Ron if he pursues his feelings. Although he's a brave and accomplished wizard, he proves markedly less emotionally mature than the women in his life, namely Ginny and Hermione. Harry also struggles with feelings of isolation and vulnerability as he realizes that the adults who have always supported him can no longer protect him or help him defeat Voldemort. Indeed, after suffering the death of Dumbledore, a trusted mentor and authority figure, Harry has to take on adult responsibilities in the fight against Voldemort long before he feels ready to do so.

Albus Dumbledore – The Headmaster of Hogwarts, the leader of the Order of the Phoenix, and one of the most accomplished wizards of all time. Dumbledore has long made it his mission to lead the combat against Voldemort, and in *Half-Blood Prince* he begins to develop a closer personal relationship to Harry and teach him how he can defeat the Dark Lord. In his rigorous analysis of Voldemort's history and weaknesses, Dumbledore emerges as a foil to the Ministry, which has no idea what drives the Dark Lord and proves inept and inefficient in its response to his return. Dumbledore also becomes more of a central paternal figure to Harry in this installment of the series, giving him advice about the future and helping him cope with Sirius's death. At the same time, it sometimes seems that Dumbledore values Harry chiefly as a tool against Voldemort, instead of simply as a young boy; in this sense their relationship underscores Harry's lack of a parental figure whose primary concern is his well-being. At the end of the novel Dumbledore is murdered by Severus Snape. The fall of such a prominent wizard ushers in a new era of insecurity and anxiety for the Wizarding world, and shows Harry that he can no longer expect adult protection in his battle against Voldemort.

Lord Voldemort / Tom Riddle – Also known as the Dark Lord, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, or You-Know-Who, Voldemort is the novel's antagonist, a Dark wizard who has recently returned to his full strength and is now marshaling his army to wreak havoc on the Wizarding world. Cruel, cold, and solitary, Voldemort demands absolute devotion from his followers but remains fundamentally isolated and alone, never forming friendships or placing his trust in anyone. In previous books he's appeared as a shadowy figure with little characterization or background, but in *Half-Blood Prince* it emerges that Voldemort comes from a prestigious but bigoted and cruel family, that even as a young child he desired to hurt and control others, and

that he was planning his rise to power even as a student at Hogwarts. In some ways, Voldemort's background is similar to Harry's: both come from families who care more about status and power than the well-being of their offspring, both grow up as lonely orphans, and both find their first sense of security and belonging at Hogwarts. However, while Harry transcends his upbringing to forge meaningful relationships and develop good values, Voldemort succumbs to his own, inheriting his family's sense of uniqueness and entitlement and never valuing the power of love. In this sense, Voldemort is a foil to Harry, showing how personal choices cause people to evolve in radically different directions, even if they begin life in similar circumstances.

Ron Weasley – One of Harry's best friends. A member of the large and gregarious Weasley clan, Ron welcomes Harry into his family, providing the home and security his orphaned friend lacks, lacks despite Harry's superior wealth and status in the Wizarding world. Ron is extremely brave and loyal – he never shies away from helping Harry with a dangerous task and proves a heroic fighter in battles like the one that occurs at the end of *Half-Blood Prince*. However, he often feels overshadowed by his friends because he lacks Hermione's intelligence and Harry's unique position in the fight against Voldemort. His feelings of inferiority frequently making him lash out at his friends: for example, he starts dating Lavender Brown because he's intimidated by Hermione, even though it's increasingly clear that he's in love with his best friend and she's extremely upset by this relationship. Throughout the novel Ron displays remarkable insensitivity to Hermione's feelings, as well as a sexist desire to control his sister Ginny's love life and relationship with Harry. However, at the end of the book he reconciles with Hermione and helps lead the fight against the Death Eaters who have infiltrated Hogwarts. These events both raise his sense of self-worth and foreshadow the development of new emotional maturity in the series' final installment.

Hermione Granger – One of Harry's best friends. Hermione is indisputably the smartest witch in her class at Hogwarts, as well as the hardest working. Nevertheless, because of her Muggle heritage she's often exposed to prejudiced comments from professors like Slughorn or outright bigotry from Malfoy. Her intelligence often proves indispensable to the trio's efforts to fight Voldemort, as she's able to supply critical information or decipher complex puzzles. Hermione also often acts as the trio's moral compass, forcing Harry and Ron to think about the ethical implications of their more dubious choices, like relying on the *Half-Blood Prince*'s annotations or using house-elf labor to follow Malfoy. Like Ginny, Hermione is far more emotionally mature than Harry and Ron, and this disparity sometimes makes her feel alienated and lonely: while Hermione is comfortable with her crush on Ron, she has to deal with his mood swings and hurtful behavior as he grapples with his

feelings for her. At the end of the novel Hermione prepares to accompany Harry on his journey to find the [Horcruxes](#), affirming the bravery and loyalty she's shown since her first year at Hogwarts.

Severus Snape – The Potions professor at Hogwarts, and a longtime member of the Order of the Phoenix. Cold and enigmatic, Snape is still nursing his resentment for being bullied by James Potter during his time at Hogwarts, which he expresses by treating Harry with malice and cruelty. His conduct, as well as the knowledge that he once belonged to Voldemort's Death Eaters, causes Harry to loathe the professor and suspect him of aiding the Dark wizard. However, he's unable to shake Dumbledore's trust in him; in remaining loyal to Snape, the headmaster shows Harry his faith in the possibility of personal transformation and redemption. At the end of the novel, Snape kills Dumbledore and appears to help the Death Eaters who have infiltrated Hogwarts. This shocking act seems to confirm Harry's belief that those who have once been evil can't change their ways; however, it also foregrounds one of the most important revelations of *Deathly Hallows*.

Ginny Weasley – Ron's sister and the youngest member of the Weasley clan. Ginny is a tough and talented witch, as well as an excellent Quidditch player. In *Half-Blood Prince* Ginny begins to step out from her brothers' shadow, developing a close friendship with Hermione and dating Dean Thomas despite Ron's disapproval. While she's nursed a crush on Harry for years, he only reciprocates her feelings this year and is hesitant to pursue them for fear of disrupting his friendship with Ron. However, in her relationships with both Dean and Harry, Ginny displays remarkable self-confidence and insists that Ron is not entitled to any input on her romantic decisions. In doing so, she manifests an emotional maturity that neither her brother nor Harry currently possess.

Horace Slughorn – Hogwarts's new Potions professor, whom Dumbledore recruits at the beginning of the novel. While he seems to be a kindly and gregarious old man, Slughorn is also cowardly, more concerned with his own safety and comfort than anything else, and dominated by his obsession with influence and fame. Ignoring those whom he considers less worthy, he chooses favorite students based on their likelihood to achieve success later in life; this tendency causes him to become close to the young Voldemort and even give him fatal information about [Horcruxes](#). However, he also stops short of joining the Death Eaters and helps Harry's quest by revealing a critical memory about Voldemort's time at Hogwarts. Ultimately, Slughorn's ambiguous character shows Harry how hard it is to categorize people simply as good or evil.

Professor McGonagall – The Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts, Head of Gryffindor House, and Transfiguration professor. Stern and formidable, she expects hard work and exemplary behavior out of all her students and never hesitates to reprimand those of her own house; in this sense she's a foil

to Snape, who shows unprofessional favoritism towards Slytherin students. After Dumbledore's death she acts swiftly to prevent discord at Hogwarts.

Draco Malfoy – Harry's longtime nemesis, now a Death Eater charged with murdering Dumbledore. Although he's outwardly cruel, prejudiced, and completely committed to Voldemort's service, inwardly Draco is confused and reluctant to take on this new and villainous role. Over the course of the novel he seems increasingly sick, paranoid, and vulnerable – Harry even catches him crying to Moaning Myrtle about his fear of Voldemort. It's clear that he's only working for Voldemort in order to ensure his family's standing and safety. Like Harry, Draco has been thrust into adulthood long before he is ready for it. Although Harry feels suspicious of and vengeful towards Draco for much of the novel, this parallel eventually causes him to reevaluate his enemy and understand his actions in terms of their context, rather than in a stark paradigm of good and evil.

Molly Weasley – Ron's mother and the matriarch of the Weasley clan. Assertive and resourceful, Mrs. Weasley manages to care for her family on a tiny budget and acts as a surrogate mother to Harry, who comes to consider her house, the Burrow, as his real home. Mrs. Weasley shows that a family's character depends less on its wealth or status in the outside world than the values and relationships it cultivates in its members. She's a foil to mothers like Aunt Petunia or Narcissa Malfoy, whose negative values harm their sons' characters or drive them towards evil.

Arthur Weasley – Ron's father and Mrs. Weasley's husband. Humble and unassuming, Mr. Weasley is a minor Ministry employee with little standing in the outside world; however, he's also a devoted father and a trusted mentor to other young wizards like Harry. Mr. Weasley's gentle character and strong sense of valor and loyalty make him an emblem of positive family values. He's a foil to fathers like Uncle Vernon or Lucius Malfoy, whose obsession with status and power pushes their sons in the wrong direction.

Percy Weasley – Ron's older brother and a Ministry employee. The most conventionally successful Weasley, Percy broke with his family in *Order of the Phoenix* because of their allegiance to Dumbledore and defiance of the Ministry's official narrative about Voldemort's return. Currently he is still estranged, although he visits the Weasleys in his capacity as Scrimgeour's personal assistant, when the Minister of Magic wants to ingratiate himself with Harry.

Fleur Delacour – Bill's fiancée, one of the competitors in the Triwizard Tournament of Harry's fourth year. Because she's part veela, Fleur exercises a supernatural attraction over many men, while her somewhat smug and self-satisfied behavior engenders the animosity of Hermione and the Weasley women. Although Mrs. Weasley is at first deeply opposed to the match, the two women reconcile when Fleur demonstrates her

devotion to Bill in the wake of his werewolf attack.

Hagrid – The Hogwarts groundskeeper and Care of Magical Creatures teacher, and Harry’s longtime friend and ally. While many people look down on Hagrid for his giant blood and unmannerly demeanor, Harry values his loyalty and bravery. Hagrid is one of many demonstrations that material wealth and social status rarely correspond with good character.

Narcissa Malfoy – Draco’s mother and Lucius’s wife. Although she’s a member of a prominent Death Eater family, Narcissa is much more concerned with preserving Draco’s well-being than serving Voldemort. When Voldemort forces Draco to undertake the task of killing Dumbledore, she’s petrified rather than proud, and begs Snape to take care of her son. Her maternal love humanizes her entire family and points out the difficulty in classifying people as either entirely good or evil.

Uncle Vernon – Harry’s uncle and Aunt Petunia’s husband. Grumpy, uncommunicative, and occasionally violent, Uncle Vernon has always mistreated and undervalued Harry while spoiling his own son, Dudley. He’s also overly interested in money – the only time he displays interest in Harry is when Dumbledore reveals that Sirius has died and left his godson all his property. Typifying negative family values, Uncle Vernon is a reminder of the harsh circumstances under which Harry grows up. Because of his poor relationship with his uncle, Harry goes out of his way to forge positive familial connections, such as his relationship with the Weasleys.

Aunt Petunia – Harry’s aunt and Uncle Vernon’s husband. A deeply conventional and uptight woman, Aunt Petunia has always disliked and feared Harry for his tendency to say and do odd things. Because of this, she’s never shown him any warmth or care. Like Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia represents the troubled and unloving family dynamic in which Harry grew up and which he now seeks to escape. Their relationship also demonstrates Harry’s ability to reject the unloving circumstances of his youth in order to forge positive and meaningful relationships with others, like Ron and Hermione.

Dudley Dursley – Harry’s cousin, Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon’s son. For most of their lives Dudley has bullied Harry with impunity, as his parents spoil him and deeply dislike their nephew. However, while Harry has managed to overcome his upbringing and become a brave and well-adjusted teenager, Dudley has fallen victim to it, becoming a self-satisfied oaf with no social skills. Dumbledore’s remark that the Dursleys have inflicted “appalling damage” on their son points out the extent to which character can be shaped by family circumstances.

Cornelius Fudge – The Minister of Magic who has governed the Wizarding world since Harry’s childhood, but who is replaced at the beginning of *Half-Blood Prince* by Rufus Scrimgeour. Pompous, indecisive, and generally self-serving, Fudge typifies the bureaucratic incompetence that hinders the Ministry’s ability to fight Voldemort. However, compared to the

openly unscrupulous Scrimgeour, he often appears sympathetic and well-meaning.

Rufus Scrimgeour – The new Minister of Magic, who replaces Cornelius Fudge at the beginning of *Half-Blood Prince*. Because of his tough demeanor and background as an Auror, the Wizarding community believes that he’s prepared to combat Voldemort. However, it soon becomes apparent that Scrimgeour is better at pretending the situation is under control than actually doing anything useful. His repeated attempts to use Harry in Ministry propaganda campaigns convince Harry of the government’s inability to lead the fight against Voldemort.

Sirius Black – Harry’s godfather and James Potter’s best friend. A member of a prominent Death Eater family, Sirius defected to the Order of the Phoenix and was disowned by all of his relatives – like Harry, he rejects his family’s bad values in order to become a better person. Since meeting Sirius in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry has been bolstered by the presence of a paternal figure in his life. However, Sirius’s recent death at the end of *Order of the Phoenix* demonstrates that the authority figures in Harry’s life aren’t infallible, and can’t always stand between him and Voldemort.

Remus Lupin – One of James Potter’s best friends, a werewolf and member of the Order of the Phoenix. Like Sirius, Lupin is a link to Harry’s father – but he’s more thoughtful and less impetuous than his friends, allowing him to provide measured guidance to Harry. In *Half-Blood Prince*, Lupin works as Dumbledore’s agent among the werewolf population, who are largely aligned with Voldemort. He’s also in love with Tonks but resists embarking on a relationship with her, not wanting her to share his poverty and the outcast status he endures as a werewolf.

Neville Longbottom – A fellow Gryffindor and Harry’s increasingly close friend. Usually considered clumsy and uncool, Neville has recently proved himself by battling alongside Harry at the end of *Order of the Phoenix* and enjoys a measure of celebrity status for being present for Voldemort’s return at the Ministry, but despite his increased standing he remains humble and unassuming. Harry shows his appreciation for Neville’s genuine loyalty by choosing to spend time with him instead of other students who are more interested in his power and fame.

Luna Lovegood – A Ravenclaw student and one of Harry’s friends. Because she dresses oddly, behaves eccentrically, and has a habit of telling uncomfortable truths, Luna is considered an oddity at school and has few friends. However, Harry appreciates her loyalty and her complete lack of interest in the material concerns like power or status that drive most people’s behavior towards him.

Cormac McLaggen – A fellow Gryffindor who becomes a fixture at Slughorn’s parties and suppers as a result of his

prestigious family and connections to Rufus Scrimgeour. Blustering and arrogant, Cormac tries out for Ron's position on the Quidditch team but fails because Hermione discreetly Confunds him. Cormac's self-confidence and status with Slughorn exacerbate Ron's feelings of inferiority, since he's a nervous Quidditch player and never attracts the professor's attention. Accordingly, to get back at Ron for dating Lavender, Hermione briefly dates Cormac; but, disgusted with his self-centeredness, she soon abandons this enterprise. By the end of the novel Cormac emerges as a foil to Ron, showing that wealth and social status don't compensate for genuine loyalty and the ability to work as part of a team.

Cho Chang – A Ravenclaw student and Harry's former love interest. After the failure of their relationship, both Harry and Cho are too embarrassed to speak to each other; this awkward state of affairs convinces Harry that romance is diametrically opposed to friendship, and makes him reluctant to act on his feelings for Ginny.

Marietta – Cho Chang's best friend, who betrayed Dumbledore's Army to Professor Umbridge in *Order of the Phoenix*. In her brief appearance in *Half-Blood Prince*, her face is still scarred by pimples spelling out the word "sneak," the result of an enchantment Hermione placed on all the members of the D.A. Harry's vindictive pleasure at seeing this shows his tendency to categorize people as good or evil, rather than trying to understand or forgive their actions.

Marvolo Gaunt – Voldemort's grandfather. Marvolo is the scion of the Gaunt family, which was once wealthy and prestigious but has now lost its status and developed a reputation for inbreeding and insanity. Despite the squalor in which he lives, Marvolo is fixated on his family pedigree and teaches his children, Morfin and Merope, to despise Muggles and think well of themselves because of their pureblood heritage. Although Voldemort never meets his grandfather, he inherits his feelings of uniqueness and entitlement and his belief in the superiority of pureblood wizards.

Morfin Gaunt – Marvolo's son and Voldemort's uncle. Encouraged by his father, Morfin attacks Muggles living in the village near the family's home and is sent to Azkaban for his behavior. As a young man Voldemort returns to his ancestral village, murders his Muggle father and grandparents, and frames Morfin for the crime. Morfin is sent to Azkaban and, despite Dumbledore's eventual proof of his innocence, dies there.

Merope Gaunt – Voldemort's mother. A member of the ancient but now impoverished Gaunt family, Merope is physically and emotionally abused by her father, Marvolo, and brother, Morfin. When they are sent to Azkaban, she's able to freely exercise her powers for the first time, using her abilities to cast a spell on a wealthy Muggle, Tom Riddle, Sr., with whom she is in love. Under the force of her enchantment the two get married

and she becomes pregnant, but when she releases him from the spell, he immediately abandons her. Merope gives birth to her son, Tom Riddle Jr., at an orphanage and dies, apparently of despair and heartbreak.

Tom Riddle, Sr. – Voldemort's father, a wealthy Muggle. The sparse information Dumbledore gathers about him testifies to a selfish and unsympathetic character: in Ogden's memory he drives by the Gaunt's filthy cottage and laughs at the squalor in which the family lives, and later on he abandons Merope and their unborn child. Eventually, he falls victim to his son, who murders him and his parents in their home.

Kreacher – A house-elf who once belonged to Sirius. While Harry feels no affection for the house-elf, who passed information about Sirius to the Death Eaters and helped bring about his death, he's careful not to abuse his power over Kreacher, showing that his character isn't swayed by the possession of power or material wealth.

Fenrir Greyback – A werewolf and Death Eater. Unlike Lupin, who strives to overcome his disability and live a normal life, Greyback embraces his status and actively tries to bite children, attempting to create an army of werewolves who will fight against wizards. Although he's a brutal and extremely unsympathetic character, his disaffection with the Wizarding world is at least partly a result of the stigma and prejudice that exists against werewolves.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Bill Weasley – Ron's oldest brother, who works as a curse-breaker for Gringotts bank. He is engaged to Fleur Delacour. In the final battle of *Half-Blood Prince* he is bitten by the werewolf Fenrir Greyback and severely mutilated, although he does not actually become a werewolf.

Fred Weasley – Ron's older brother and George's twin. Using Harry's winnings from the Triwizard Tournament, Fred and George have just opened a wildly successful joke shop. Although they're given to teasing and practical jokes, Fred and George are deeply loyal to their family.

George Weasley – Ron's older brother and Fred's twin. Using Harry's winnings from the Triwizard Tournament, Fred and George have just opened a wildly successful joke shop. Although they're given to teasing and practical jokes, Fred and George are deeply loyal to their family.

Professor Trelawney – One of Hogwarts' professors of Divination. Although she's largely incompetent and has taken to drinking, Trelawney also made the famous prophecy that named Harry or Neville as Voldemort's greatest enemy, and led Voldemort to kill Harry's parents.

The Muggle Prime Minister – The Prime Minister of Muggle England, whom Fudge and Scrimgeour visit briefly to inform of Voldemort's return. Like his Wizarding counterparts, the

Muggle Prime Minister seems more concerned with preserving his power and reputation than protecting his constituents; also like them, he emerges as completely unequipped to fight Voldemort.

Lily Potter – Harry’s mother, who was killed by Voldemort during Harry’s infancy. In *Half-Blood Prince*, Slughorn frequently mentions that her gift for Potions made her one of his favorite students, despite her Muggle ancestry.

James Potter – Harry’s father, who was killed by Voldemort during Harry’s infancy. Although Harry treasures his father’s memory and wants to emulate his bravery and loyalty, he’s recently caught a glimpse of his flaws by entering Snape’s memories and watching James bully him mercilessly during their time at Hogwarts.

Nymphadora Tonks – Sirius’s cousin and a member of the Order of the Phoenix. Like Sirius, she is alienated from most of her family because of her mother’s decision to marry a Muggle and abandon Voldemort’s side. She is in love with Remus Lupin.

Wormtail / Peter Pettigrew – One of the four Marauders – James Potter’s clique at Hogwarts – who later betrayed Harry’s father and now works for Voldemort. Pettigrew appears only briefly in *Half-Blood Prince*, as a servant to Severus Snape.

Dean Thomas – A Gryffindor in Harry’s class and Ginny’s boyfriend for much of the novel. As Harry’s feelings for Ginny become stronger, he’s disturbed to find himself disliking Dean, with whom he’s always been friendly.

Lavender Brown – A fellow Gryffindor and Ron’s girlfriend for much of the novel. Lavender’s sappy and sentimental behavior alternately flatters and disconcerts Ron; meanwhile, their relationship hurts Hermione and annoys Harry. Ron’s relationship with Lavender represents the ways in which romance can disrupt pre-existing friendships.

Katie Bell – A seventh-year student and Chaser on the Gryffindor Quidditch team. Katie falls victim to the Imperius Curse and is forced to deliver a cursed necklace to Hogwarts. When she accidentally touches the necklace the plot is discovered and stopped, but she almost dies as a result.

Hokey – A house-elf working for Hepzibah Smith. Through the elf’s memory, Harry and Dumbledore witness the elderly witch show a young Voldemort her two treasures, the cup of Hufflepuff and locket of Slytherin. Shortly after this visit Voldemort murders her, steals her valuable possessions, and frames Hokey for the crime.

Hepzibah Smith – A rich and elderly witch who, besotted by the young Tom Riddle, reveals two ancient relics that she owns: the cup of Hufflepuff and the locket of Slytherin. Subsequently, Riddle kills her and turns the artifacts into [Horcruxes](#).

Dobby – A house-elf Harry has known for years, who once belonged to the Malfoy family and has lived at Hogwarts since his emancipation. Dobby helps Harry by tracking Draco’s

movements, although he’s unable to uncover much information.

Bob Ogden – A Ministry employee who visits the Gaunts and apprehends Morfin for attacking Muggles. Through Ogden’s memory, Harry and Dumbledore gain some insight into the nefarious behavior and values of Voldemort’s family.

Caractacus Burke – One of the owners of Borgin and Burkes, the infamous purveyor of sinister secondhand goods. Burke gives Dumbledore his memory of buying Merope’s valuable locket and paying far less than the valuable antique was worth.

Borgin – One of the owners of Borgin and Burkes, an infamous purveyor of sinister secondhand goods.

Mundungus Fletcher – A conman, thief, and half-hearted member of the Order of the Phoenix. In Hogsmeade, Harry encounters Mundungus selling items pilfered from Sirius’s house and is enraged by this betrayal of his godfather’s memory.

Aragog – A giant spider living in the Forbidden Forest. A friend of Hagrid’s, he becomes ill and dies during *Half-Blood Prince*. It’s during his funeral that Harry manages to persuade Slughorn to reveal a critical memory about Voldemort’s time at Hogwarts.

Eileen Prince – Snape’s mother, from whom he derives the moniker “Prince.”

Pansy Parkinson – A Slytherin student and Draco’s love interest, who takes particular pleasure in bullying Hermione.

Dolores Umbridge – A Ministry employee and former professor of Defense Against the Dark Arts, who used her position to suppress news of Voldemort’s return. Like many people associated with the Ministry, she is much more preoccupied with maintaining an official narrative than actually fighting Death Eaters.

Kingsley Shacklebolt – An Auror working for the Ministry of Magic, who is currently embedded in the Muggle Prime Minister’s office. He’s also a member of the Order of the Phoenix.

Viktor Krum – A professional Quidditch player and one-time competitor in the Triwizard Tournament. During his time at Hogwarts he briefly dated Hermione, a relationship Ron is still jealous of two years later.

Mrs. Cole – The manager of the orphanage where Voldemort grows up.

Crabbe – One of Draco’s sidekicks, who disguises himself as a young girl in order to keep watch while Draco uses the Room of Requirement.

Goyle – One of Draco’s sidekicks, who disguises himself as a young girl in order to keep watch while Draco uses the Room of Requirement.

Susan Bones – A Hufflepuff student, and the niece of Amelia Bones.

Madam Pomfrey – Hogwarts’ resident Healer, who runs the

hospital ward and cares for students and teachers who suffer injuries and ailments.

Armando Dippet – Dumbledore's predecessor as Headmaster of Hogwarts. Like many other teachers, he was taken in by the young Voldemort's combination of talent and flattery. Only on Dumbledore's advice did he refrain from hiring the young man as a Hogwarts teacher.

Demelza Robbins – A Chaser on the Gryffindor Quidditch team.

Madam Rosmerta – The proprietress of the Three Broomsticks. At the end of the novel Dumbledore discovers that Draco has placed her under the Imperius Curse and forced her to assist in his various plots, like passing the cursed necklace to Katie Bell and poisoning a bottle of mead intended for Dumbledore.

Leanne – Katie Bell's best friend.

Jack Sloper – A Beater on the Gryffindor Quidditch team.

Parvati Patil – A Gryffindor student.

Zacharias Smith – A Hufflepuff student whom Harry dislikes for his smug and biased commentary during Quidditch matches.

Blaise Zabini – A Slytherin student who becomes a fixture at Slughorn's parties and suppers, as a result of his famous mother.

Bellatrix Lestrange – Narcissa Malfoy's sister, a prominent Death Eater. Unlike Narcissa, Bellatrix cares little about family ties and is obsessed with Voldemort to the point of mental derangement. In *Order of the Phoenix* she kills her cousin, Sirius Black.

Lucius Malfoy – Draco's father, currently in Azkaban for supporting Voldemort during the battle at the Ministry of Magic at the end of *Order of the Phoenix*.

Igor Karkaroff – A former Death Eater and headmaster of the Durmstrang Institute, another Wizarding school that Viktor Krum attends. When Voldemort returns to life and summons his minions, Karkaroff tries to resist rejoining the Death Eaters and is murdered.

Mr. Ollivander – The owner of Diagon Alley's wand shop and a prominent member of the Wizarding community. Early in the novel he's kidnapped by Death Eaters, showing that Voldemort's return will disrupt the most essential aspects of Wizarding life.

Florian Fortescue – The beloved owner of an ice cream shop in Diagon Alley. Early in the novel he's kidnapped by Death Eaters, showing that Voldemort's return will disrupt the most essential aspects of Wizarding life.

Madam Malkin – The owner of a robe shop in Diagon Alley.

Professor Flitwick – The Head of Ravenclaw House and

Charms professor.

Professor Sprout – The Head of Hufflepuff and Herbology Professor.

Stan Shunpike – The conductor of the Knight Bus, who is falsely accused of being a Death Eater and imprisoned by the Ministry. Shunpike's unjust detention reflects the Ministry's desire to seem competent at any cost.

Argus Filch – The deeply unpleasant caretaker at Hogwarts.

Romilda Vane – A fourth-year Gryffindor, who tries to slip Harry a love potion in a box of chocolates.

Helga Hufflepuff – One of Hogwarts' original founders.

Salazar Slytherin – One of Hogwarts' original founders.

Rowena Ravenclaw – One of Hogwarts' original founders.

Godric Gryffindor – One of Hogwarts' original founders.

Moaning Myrtle – A ghost who haunts the Hogwarts bathrooms. In *Half-Blood Prince* Myrtle befriends Draco, taking pity on his growing anxiety and paranoia over his task from Voldemort.

The Fat Lady – An enchanted portrait who guards the entrance to Gryffindor Tower.

Nearly Headless Nick – One of Hogwarts' resident ghosts.

Hannah Abbott A Hufflepuff in the same year as Harry, and a member of Dumbledore's Army. She has to leave school when her mother is murdered by Death Eaters.

Amelia Bones The Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. She is killed by Death Eaters.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



GOOD VS. EVIL

Throughout his life, the plucky and adventurous young wizard Harry Potter has been pitted against Lord Voldemort, a rogue wizard determined to kill him; in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, their combat intensifies as Voldemort returns to the Wizarding world and begins to gather his army. Until now, the *Harry Potter* series has portrayed a fairly straightforward conflict between good people, represented by Harry, and bad ones, represented by Voldemort, with few characters populating the middle of this spectrum. However, the sixth book introduces more characters who are torn between their good and bad impulses. Because of this, Harry has to figure out not only how to defeat his enemies

but how to behave towards people of ambiguous moral standing. While Harry has trouble accepting that the people around him can occupy a middle ground between good and evil, by the end of the novel he's beginning to acknowledge the possibility of moral redemption for the first time.

In the several installments preceding *Half-Blood Prince*, the contrast between good and evil is usually stark and uncomplicated. Harry and his friends fight Voldemort through a series of proxies – such as the ghostly Tom Riddle – each of whom proves irredeemably evil. Some characters, like Professor Quirrell or Peter Pettigrew, may seem good or have been good in the past, but after revealing themselves as Voldemort's allies they lose all positive characteristics. Pettigrew, who initially seems only weak and cowardly, brutally kills Cedric Diggory at the end of *Goblet of Fire*, proving himself devoid of compassion, and at the beginning of *Half-Blood Prince* Harry casually remarks that Quirrell “deserved” to be killed – dismissing any possibility of nuance in the villain's character.

However, *Half-Blood Prince* foregrounds several characters of troublingly uncertain morals. In one of the opening chapters, Dumbledore employs Harry to persuade Horace Slughorn to teach at Hogwarts. While the new Potions professor is a genial and well-intentioned man who behaves kindly towards Harry, it's clear that he's only interested in young people for their potential to accrue power and accolades. Because of this preoccupation, he displays crucially bad judgment, inadvertently enabling the young Lord Voldemort to immortalize himself through [Horcruxes](#).

Similarly, Narcissa Malfoy's visit with Snape in the second chapter reveals that Draco is actively working for Lord Voldemort. Eventually, it emerges that Draco has been tasked with killing Dumbledore – confirming the suspicions of his loyalty that Harry has held since their first year at Hogwarts. However, as Draco grows paranoid and distressed over the course of the novel, it becomes increasingly clear that he's been coerced into an unsavory mission he'd rather avoid, simply because of his family's ties to the Death Eaters. Although Draco is actively assisting the forces of evil, he's also a teenager in way over his head.

Accordingly, instead of just deciding how to vanquish his enemies, Harry has to consider how to treat people who fluctuate in their moral behavior. At the beginning of the novel, he's reluctant to acknowledge any gray area between good and evil. Although he proves correct in his suspicions about Draco, his growing obsession with the other boy's movements shows a marked unwillingness to believe that someone who has behaved badly in the past could mend their ways. Similarly, he refuses to trust Snape, even when Dumbledore assures him of the professor's loyalty and believes that he has sincerely repented of his previous membership with the Death Eaters.

In fact, it's Dumbledore who constantly urges Harry to take a

larger view of moral errors and reminds him of the possibility of redemption. Even when Professor Slughorn is actively obstructing his investigations into Voldemort's past, Dumbledore is patient with the vain old man. Further, when Draco finally attempts to murder him, Dumbledore says that he understands the boy's powerlessness against Voldemort and reminds him of his better impulses, saying forcefully that “you are not a killer.”

It's difficult for Harry to fully absorb these lessons. Reeling from Dumbledore's death at the end of the novel, he feels vindicated in his distrust of Draco and vengeful towards Snape, whose motivations have not yet become clear. However, Dumbledore's example and Harry's growing understanding of moral complexity set the stage for the final installment of the series, in which Harry will learn to truly respect people who are able to redeem themselves after a moral lapse.



LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP

As in the previous *Harry Potter* novels, Harry's friendship with Ron and Hermione is central to his life and his efforts to defeat Voldemort. However,

in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, these relationship dynamics are upended by new romantic feelings and the confusion they cause. While Harry and Ron develop crushes on Ginny and Hermione, they both have trouble accepting these feelings, seeing them as destructive to their existing friendships. Moreover, uncertainty about their romantic feelings causes them to behave in sexist ways to the women in their lives, threatening their previous relationships. Ultimately, their fumbling approaches to romance reveal that despite growing into teenagers, Harry and Ron are still emotionally childish at this point, especially compared to Hermione and Ginny. However, their behavior now also foregrounds the ways in which they'll mature in the seventh and final installment.

Because they worry that romance will upend the stability of their existing relationships, Harry and Ron describe these new feelings negatively and try to evade them. When Harry walks in on Ginny making out with Dean, he describes his feelings of rejection as a “monster in his chest,” suggesting that he thinks of his crush as somehow unnatural or negative. Trying to tell himself that he's only so upset “because she's Ron's sister,” he attempts to resolve the confusion of his new feelings by cramming them into his old relationship framework.

Similarly, Ron starts dating Lavender Brown – whom he never seems to like and spends much of his time avoiding – evidently as a method of avoiding his feelings for Hermione. His effort proves futile: after his near-death experience drinking poisoned mead, it's only Hermione he wants to see. Their tender reconciliation in the hospital is a demonstration that their new feelings are normal and positive, not necessarily a threat to friendships.

What does truly endanger the trio's relationships is the paternalistic manner in which Harry and Ron treat the women in their lives while they grapple with the possibility of romance. One of the reasons Harry feels so guilty about his feelings for Ginny is that he feels they're a "betrayal" of Ron. When he fantasizes about kissing her, he always imagines Ron bursting in and yelling that Harry is "supposed to be my friend." In a sense, Harry sees Ginny as belonging to Ron, even though it's none of her brother's business whom or how she dates. Even when Harry finally kisses Ginny after a dramatic Quidditch match, he's relieved that Ron gives his "blessing" with a tiny nod of his head.

Similarly, Ron's decision to date Lavender is precipitated by Ginny's revelation that Hermione kissed Viktor Krum two years before, when she was involved with him. He's enraged at hearing this, even though he's never expressed his feelings for Hermione or given her any reason not to date other boys. Here, Ron seems to feel entitled to control over Hermione's romantic life – which, as Ginny points out derisively, he's not.

While Harry and Ron are taking on adult roles in the fight against Voldemort, they remain remarkably childish when it comes to their love lives – especially compared to the maturity displayed by Ginny and Hermione. Even when Hermione is at her most petty – for example, making a show of inviting Cormac McLaggen to a dance in order to make Ron jealous – she displays an acute understanding of her friends' feelings and motivations, which Ron and Harry clearly lack. Watching this episode play out, Harry describes Hermione as simply preoccupied with "revenge," rather than trying to empathize with her feelings of rejection and abandonment.

Both Hermione and Ginny reject the paternalistic attitudes Harry and Ron briefly develop. Hermione is appalled both by Ron's apparent belief that he should control her love life and by the crass self-centeredness of Cormac, whom she briefly dates. Ginny is even more explicitly dismissive of men who believe that romance entails taking care of or controlling a woman. While she dates Dean Thomas for most of the novel, she ultimately dumps him in a fit of annoyance after he "helps" her through the portrait hole one too many times. At the end of the novel, Harry breaks off their nascent relationship as well, telling her that he's doing so to "protect" her from Voldemort. He sees this as an act of chivalry, but Ginny says he's being "stupid" and "noble," implicitly suggesting that she should have a choice too in whether or not she is "protected."

Ending with the dissolution of Harry and Ginny's relationship and the trio's decision to fight Voldemort together, *Half-Blood Prince* seems to discard the prospect of romance in favor of the friendship dynamics that have existed throughout the series. However, Harry and Ron's fumbling experiments foreground the ways in which they'll mature next year, as Harry learns to respect Ginny's abilities as a warrior in her own right and Ron courts Hermione on her own terms, rather than trying to

control her.



COMING OF AGE

In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, a brave teenage wizard fights against his increasingly powerful enemy, Lord Voldemort. While Harry and his best friends, Ron and Hermione, have faced challenges from Voldemort since their childhood, they've usually been supported and protected by powerful adult figures. However, in this installment of the series many of these adults die or prove unable to fight Voldemort, forcing the trio to take a riskier and more independent role in the struggle. For Harry and his friends, growing up is linked to the loss of loved ones and the increasing awareness of their own vulnerable position. While the novel applauds the trio's development into brave and competent young adults, it presents coming of age not as a gradual and positive process but an abrupt and often painful reckoning with one's own mortality.

The novel is bookended by the deaths of the two most important parental figures in Harry's life. It opens with Harry's devastation at his godfather Sirius's death at the end of *Order of the Phoenix*. The strongest link to Harry's biological parents, Sirius has been a source of advice and support since the third book, and Harry has always hoped to make a home with his godfather – a possibility now abruptly closed off.

At the end of novel, Dumbledore himself is killed when Death Eaters storm the castle. Since the start of the series he's made most of the major decisions about Harry's life; when he reprimands the Dursleys at the beginning of the novel for failing to adequately care for Harry, he implicitly contrasts their neglect with the protection and care he's provided, if often from a distance. Throughout *Half-Blood Prince* he takes on an additional mentoring role by giving Harry private classes, and Harry displays his growing sense of closeness with Dumbledore by taking his side in a quarrel with Rufus Scrimgeour, proudly telling the Minister of Magic that he's "Dumbledore's man through and through." By stressing their bond throughout the year, the novel creates the sense that at its end Harry loses not just a teacher but a parent.

It's not just Harry who suffers the loss of trusted authority figures. At one point Hannah Abbott, another student in their year, finds out suddenly that her mother has been killed. Additionally, at the beginning of the novel Cornelius Fudge comments to the Muggle Prime Minister on a series of murders, including of Amelia Bones, head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. The sudden loss of someone entrusted with protecting the entire Wizarding community reflects on a larger scale the losses that Harry experiences personally.

Because of the prevalence of death and loss at this time, Harry and his friends experience the process of coming of age not as a

gradual development of independence but as an abrupt and unwelcome lurch into a world in which they are extremely vulnerable and must learn to protect themselves. At this time, the trio should be looking forward to the possibilities of adult life, and indeed at the beginning of the novel they're excited to receive their O.W.L. results and think about the careers they might pursue; however, as the novel progresses they shift to contemplating the prospect that they too might become casualties in the fight against Voldemort. As Hermione reads the *Daily Prophet* each morning, Ron asks her "in a determinedly casual voice" if "anyone we know [is] dead"; for him, growing up means learning to feign toughness about the increasing danger in which he lives. Dumbledore himself comments that Sirius's death is "a brutal ending to what should have been a long and happy relationship," articulating the sense of sudden vulnerability that Harry feels in the wake of this loss.

At the end of the novel, as Harry decides to leave Hogwarts to seek out Voldemort's [Horcruxes](#), his new adult responsibility comes with the feeling of being completely unprotected. At Dumbledore's funeral he thinks that "all the people who cared about him had stood in front of him one by one" and are now dead; he chastises himself for ever having believed "that the shelter of a parent's arms meant nothing could hurt him." Even though Ron and Hermione insist on accompanying him on his quest, he ends the novel imagining the "dark and twisted path...stretching ahead for himself." For Harry, coming of age doesn't just entail learning to care for himself but radical disillusionment with the idea that anyone else *could* take care of him.

In its relatively grim portrayal of the process of growing up, *Half-Blood Prince* diverges from the previous *Harry Potter* books, in which the trio takes on increasing responsibility but is always bolstered by protective adults. By chronicling Harry's changing attitudes towards the adults who have always cared for him, the novel argues that coming of age is as much a matter of loss as it is of growth.



FAMILY

While Harry has been an orphan since infancy, families happy and unhappy abound in the sixth installment of his narrative. Besides portraying the Weasleys and the Dursleys – families who have been important parts of his life since the first book – the novel provides new insight into other, previously inscrutable families, including the Malfoys and even Lord Voldemort's own parents. In the book, a family's values both reflect and influence its members' characters: generally, families concerned with money or power produce troubled or malignant offspring, while loving and supportive families raise brave and well-adjusted children. Notably, while Harry grows up among the first kind of family (the Dursleys), he makes his home in the second (the Weasleys). Harry's disdain for prestige and conscious embrace

of the Weasleys' positive values displays innate goodness; at the same time, it becomes clear that the Weasleys' care and support is at least partially responsible for the stalwart character he develops and the brave deeds he's able to achieve.

In *Half-Blood Prince*, dysfunctional families are linked by their obsession with wealth and status, often dooming their children in pursuit of these worldly goals. While Harry has always seen Draco Malfoy as unfairly advantaged by his family's wealth and connections, in this novel it becomes clear that the Malfoys' obsession with prestige and determination to maintain Lord Voldemort's favor dooms Draco to become a Death Eater and a murderer. Not only has his family contributed to his unscrupulous character, it has actively limited his future prospects. Similarly, Harry's spoiled cousin Dudley completely absorbs his parents' obsession with material possessions and success, as a result becoming a boorish and uneducated young man. Dumbledore himself points out that it's the Dursleys' neglect of Harry that has saved him from the "appalling damage" they have inflicted on Dudley's character.

Half-Blood Prince also imparts new information about Voldemort's family: his mother Merope comes from a depraved family obsessed with its noble descent, and his father is a wealthy Muggle who abandons his son in disgust after discovering that Merope is a witch. Both sides of Voldemort's family are destructively obsessed with the symbols of prestige dominant in their respective worlds, and the novel suggests that Voldemort's character is at least partly the result of parental abandonment and the unloving upbringing he received. The knowledge that his long-standing enemies are shaped by the dynamics of their wealthy and powerful families imbues Harry with a prudent suspicion of these material advantages. It also complicates his approach to people who do evil things, because he's forced to understand that bad character is at least partly the result of the treatment one receives from one's family.

In contrast, although families like the Weasleys can't offer their children many material advantages, their emphasis on character development fosters familial cohesion and equips their children to pursue meaningful lives. Unlike many of the novel's villainous families, the Weasleys reject the pursuit of riches unless they are achieved through good character. While Percy, having achieved a high position in the Ministry of Magic, is the most conventionally successful Weasley, he's abandoned his parents' values and Dumbledore's leadership to acquire it; because of this, his success causes a rift with his family. Similarly, the Weasleys are all suspicious of Bill's fiancée, Fleur, because of her wealth and privileged background – exactly the attributes that families like the Malfoys value. Only after Bill is bitten by a werewolf and Fleur proves her genuine love and loyalty by staying with him, does Mrs. Weasley finally accept her into the family.

Throughout the series, Ron's poverty has contrasted with

Draco's conspicuous wealth; both he and Harry have seen it as a disadvantage. However, in *Half-Blood Prince* the love and support that all the Weasley children receive from their parents contrast with the Malfoys' subservience to Voldemort and Draco's increasingly lonely position.

Unlike many of the novel's villains, Harry explicitly rejects the materialistic family in which he grows up, showing his exemplary moral impulses; at the same time, the novel argues that his relationship with the Weasleys facilitates Harry's character development – thus giving him more advantages than he could have derived from a more materially privileged family. One of the uncanny similarities between Harry and Voldemort is that they are both raised in unloving families obsessed with money and prestige. However, while Voldemort is defined by his environment, Harry transcends it. Visiting Slughorn's house at the beginning of the novel, Harry is put off by the professor's preoccupation with material comfort and his obvious preference for students that have become powerful and famous. Hours later, when he arrives at the Weasleys' home, he's filled with affection for the Burrow's "crooked silhouette" – even though the house itself is very humble, the people he loves most are inside. Besides physically caring for Harry – Mrs. Weasley cooks for him, sends him care packages at school, and knits him sweaters for Christmas – the Weasleys model characteristics like empathy and self-sacrifice that become integral to Harry's personality. At the end of the novel, as he contemplates the dangerous path ahead, Harry is comforted by the knowledge that before he sets off to fight Voldemort he'll return to the Burrow to celebrate Bill's wedding, savoring "one last golden day of peace" with the Weasleys.

Harry's ability to discern between families that are merely privileged and those who cultivate positive values demonstrates that his character is fundamentally different from that of his adversaries. However, the Weasleys also give him the security and support he needs to develop into a hero.



POLITICS AND PARANOIA

While the first three *Harry Potter* novels focused on goings-on within Hogwarts, since Voldemort's return in *Goblet of Fire* there's been an increasing emphasis on the politics of the wider Wizarding world. This emphasis becomes even more prominent in *Half-Blood Prince*, as the Ministry of Magic finally acknowledges Voldemort's increasing strength and attempts to fight back. However, the Ministry's response proves weak and inefficient, influenced by paranoia and petty personal conflict and thus unable to contain Voldemort and his Death Eaters. In evoking a world beset by rogue extremists and crippled by an extremely flawed government, Rowling seems to refer to the state of global politics in the wake of 9/11 – the period in which she wrote the novel. In this sense, *Half-Blood Prince* reflects the anxiety of a society trying to respond to new and unpredictable threats,

while protesting against governments more concerned with their own power than the peace and safety of their constituents.

In *Half-Blood Prince*, the Wizarding world is marked by increasing terror and chaos because of the actions of a group of fringe extremists. In the first chapter, Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge and the Muggle Prime Minister discuss a recent spate of murders and "accidents" affecting wizards and Muggles alike, from a massive bridge collapse and "freak hurricane" causing scores of deaths, to the deaths of two witches working for the Ministry, Amelia Bones and Emmeline Vance.

These deaths and disasters are caused by the Death Eaters: a mysterious group of terrorists motivated by a desire for power and a belief in the supremacy of pure-blooded wizards. By targeting civilians rather than an army or government, they threaten both wizards' and Muggles' sense of personal safety and confidence in public life. In this sense, they resemble the groups who attacked the World Trade Center in 2001, giving rise to new preoccupations about religious extremism and new worries about everyday safety for civilians in countries like the US and UK.

Rather than being alleviated, these anxieties are only compounded by the government's inept and politically motivated attempts to contain Voldemort and the Death Eaters. When Fudge reveals that an extremist group is behind the recent spate of disasters, the Muggle Prime Minister is concerned primarily for the damage to his political reputation; he conceives of his constituents not as people whose safety is in danger but "voters" whose confidence in him will be undermined. At the same time, his opponent is taking the opportunity to go on the attack, "barely concealing his own broad grin" as he pontificates about the state of the country.

Wizarding politics prove similarly corrupt. Although Fudge has often proved pompous and incompetent in previous books, he seems positively benign compared to Rufus Scrimgeour, who capitalizes on Voldemort's return to push Fudge out of office and take over the post himself. Rather than devoting himself to pursuing Voldemort, Scrimgeour tries to persuade Harry to star in a publicity campaign that will raise "morale" by falsely implying the Ministry is successfully containing Voldemort's rise.

In fact, the Ministry does little more than stoke paranoia: when it can't apprehend any of Voldemort's actual followers, it scapegoats innocent people. Arrested after making some suspicious comments in a bar, Stan Shunpike, the innocuous driver of the Knight Bus, is thrown in Azkaban without trial. Mr. Weasley privately tells Harry that even after concluding he has nothing to do with the Death Eaters, the Ministry continues to imprison Stan in order to "look as though they're making some progress."

If Voldemort's return mirrors the troubling rise of extremist terrorism, then the Ministry's response critiques the actions of the US and UK governments, which in the wake of 9/11 instigated largely fruitless wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, both in order to seem powerful and to fulfill the political goals of top leaders. Moreover, instead of emphasizing that terrorism is attributable to fringe groups, many Western governments have stoked Islamophobic paranoia, which threatens the safety and social standing of Muslim minorities to this day.

Viewed in the light of contemporary politics, *Half-Blood Prince* both reflects growing anxieties about terrorism while arguing against blind trust in governments that are plagued by corruption and inefficiency. However, in investing Harry with the ability to singlehandedly defeat Voldemort and put an end to this menace, Rowling wistfully conjures up a solution to this problem that can't possibly occur in the real world.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in [blue text](#) throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



HORCRUXES

Horcruxes are objects that contain aspects of a wizard's split soul—a means of avoiding death—but the only way to split one's soul is by committing murder. As Harry learns over the course of the book, Voldemort has split his soul into seven, making six Horcruxes. These objects represent both the Dark Lord's strength and his weakness. Clearly, they make it seem even harder to defeat Voldemort—Harry has to find and destroy not just one thing, but seven. However, the Horcruxes also show Voldemort's willingness to prioritize power over humanity—besides the fact that he has to murder someone every time he makes a Horcrux, his appearance becomes more distorted every time he creates one and his ability to relate to others is further impaired with each division. Dumbledore points out that while Voldemort and Harry have similar origins, Voldemort's actions have corrupted him and prevented him from understanding the power of love and human connection, while Harry has transcended his childhood and placed interpersonal relationships at the center of his life. In this sense, the Horcruxes emblemize the radically different choices Harry and Voldemort have made, which drive their lives in different directions. While Harry is skeptical that his "ability to love" is a strategic advantage, Dumbledore argues that it gives him powerful magical protection—and he will be proven right in the series' final installment.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Scholastic edition of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* published in 2006.

Chapter One: The Other Minister Quotes

☛ The Prime Minister sank, weak-kneed, into the nearest chair. The idea of invisible creatures swooping through the towns and countryside, spreading despair and helplessness in his voters, made him feel quite faint.

Related Characters: Cornelius Fudge, The Muggle Prime Minister

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

The first chapter depicts a meeting between Cornelius Fudge and the Muggle Prime Minister, whom he gives occasional updates on events in the Wizarding world. Tonight, Fudge reveals to the Prime Minister that Voldemort has fully returned to life and is responsible for a number of mass disasters that have spilled into the Muggle world. Many of these events – such as the destruction of a bridge with hundreds of people on it – are attacks against civilians in public spaces that mirror terrorist attacks occurring in the US and Europe at the time of Rowling's writing. The opening lines thus create a link between the events of the book and real-world anxieties about public safety and extremism.

Endangered by an entity he barely understands, the Prime Minister is rightly overwhelmed – but he's worried less about the safety of his constituents than the prospect that they won't reelect him. Referring to them as "voters" rather than "people," the Prime Minister shows that he sees the population as a vehicle to personal power, rather than a group that he must serve. His self-centered attitude mirrors that of Fudge, who is most concerned about managing political fallout from these incidents, rather than preventing future tragedies. From the outset of the novel, Rowling creates an atmosphere of political instability by evoking both the danger posed by rogue extremists and the inability of petty government leaders to adequately respond to this threat.

Chapter Three: Will and Won't Quotes

☞ You did not do as I asked. You have never treated Harry as a son. He has known nothing but neglect and often cruelty at your hands. The best that can be said is that he has at least escaped the appalling damage you have inflicted upon the unfortunate boy sitting between you.

Related Characters: Albus Dumbledore (speaker), Harry Potter, Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

When Dumbledore picks Harry up from Privet Drive, he sits the reluctant Dursleys down for a conversation about Harry's future, beginning with this strong reprimand for their treatment of Harry over the years. Like many of the novel's other negatively characterized families, the Dursleys are preoccupied with social status and conventional success – Harry's inability to be conventional in any way is the reason for their antipathy towards him. Yet, even though their values caused them to treat him with "neglect and cruelty," he's still better off than Dudley, who has been completely spoiled and indoctrinated in their ways. Dumbledore argues that by ruining their characters, families like the Dursleys limit the prospects of their children's lives. Although Harry's journey to find his own family in the Weasleys has been long and sometimes lonely, it's preferable to achieving inclusion in a family like this.

Implicitly, Dumbledore also points out the similarity between Harry and Voldemort, who – as the reader will soon see – also grew up in circumstances of "neglect and cruelty." But while Voldemort is completely defined by his early life and never learns to value love or human connection, Harry transcends the family into which he is born and develops positive values and relationships. The uneasy parallels between Harry and his nemesis thus ultimately highlight Harry's exceptionally strong character.

Chapter Four: Horace Slughorn Quotes

☞ "Is he...Do you think he's good?" asked Harry.

"An interesting question," said Dumbledore. "He is able, certainly. A more decisive and forceful personality than Cornelius."

"Yes, but I meant – "

Related Characters: Harry Potter, Albus Dumbledore (speaker), Rufus Scrimgeour

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

On their way to visit Horace Slughorn, Harry asks Dumbledore a number of questions about recent events, including Rufus Scrimgeour's ascent to Minister of Magic. It's very important that Dumbledore distinguishes between "good" and "powerful" here; while Scrimgeour may be more able than Fudge, and certainly seems more appealing to the community, these traits say nothing about his character. His instinct to prioritize character over power or social capital is one of Harry's best qualities; it will show itself in his reluctance to become Slughorn's pet and his loyalty to Neville and Luna even when everyone else now wants to be friends with him. Ultimately, by forging a circle of loyal friends, this habit will actually give Harry power and confidence as he prepares to do battle with Voldemort.

☞ [Harry] could not quite keep a note of derision out of his voice; it was hard to sympathize with Slughorn's cosseted existence when he remembered Sirius, crouching in a cave and living on rats. "Most of the teachers aren't in it, and none of them has ever been killed – well, unless you count Quirrell, and he got what he deserved seeing as he was working with Voldemort."

Related Characters: Harry Potter (speaker), Lord Voldemort / Tom Riddle, Horace Slughorn, Sirius Black

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

Without much explanation, Dumbledore takes Harry on a visit to former Hogwarts professor Horace Slughorn, whom he hopes to persuade to return to school. Harry doesn't know what to make of Slughorn: the old man is genial and kind but also eager to brag about his good connections and famous students, and his reluctance to join the Order inspires Harry's disdain. At this point, Harry makes stark moral distinctions between good and bad people: here he casts Sirius as a martyred hero and Slughorn as an unmitigated coward. This habit leads him to make harsh

judgments, like casually remarking that Quirrell deserved his brutal death for his crimes. However, over the course of the novel Harry will confront characters who are neither entirely good nor bad – namely, Professor Slughorn. Doing so will force him to identify with the weaknesses he sees in others, rather than scorning them; and ultimately, he will see that changing one’s mind and reforming oneself after having done wrong is one of the bravest acts of all.

☞ He used to handpick favorites at Hogwarts, sometimes for their ambition or their brains, sometimes for their charm or their talent, and he had an uncanny knack for choosing those who would go on to become outstanding in their various fields. Horace formed a kind of club of his favorites with himself at the center, making introductions, forging useful contacts between members, and always reaping some kind of benefit in return...

Related Characters: Albus Dumbledore (speaker), Horace Slughorn

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

After securing Slughorn’s promise to return to Hogwarts in the fall, Dumbledore fills Harry in on the professor’s background and habits. Slughorn emerges as a man preoccupied with social status and tangible success. While these values are usually espoused by people who are hostile to Harry – like the Malfoys and the Dursleys – Slughorn will actually take great pains to induct him into his “club,” reflecting Harry’s rising status and reputation in the Wizarding world. However, the people whom Harry loves and respects – like the Weasleys, who are poor but kind and generous – are beneath Slughorn’s notice. Since the Weasleys are among the most positively characterized people in the novel, Slughorn’s choices of whom to befriend and whom to ignore betray the inherent falsity of his values. It’s a testament to Harry’s character that he refuses to endorse these values, even when they privilege and flatter him. In a sense, Slughorn embodies the temptations of Harry’s new celebrity status, and the boy’s ability to keep his distance from him is one of his best qualities.

☞ In spite of the feeling of dread that had just swept through him, his spirits could not help but lift at the sight of it. Ron was in there...and so was Mrs. Weasley, who could cook better than anyone he knew...

Related Characters: Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, Molly Weasley

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

It’s been an uneasy night, from Dumbledore’s announcement to the Dursleys of Harry’s imminent danger to the strange encounter with Slughorn. However, Harry instantly feels better when he sees the Burrow ahead of him and knows his friends are inside. It’s important that while Harry is unsettled and put off by Slughorn’s embrace of luxury and status, he’s instinctively drawn to the humble familial atmosphere the Burrow embodies; his thoughts here show that genuine friendships are much more important to him than “useful” connections.

The novel’s last passage, in which Harry looks forward to attending Bill’s wedding at the Burrow before setting off to fight Voldemort, echoes this early one. Both passages associate the Burrow with familial love and security, which is a calming antidote to the uncertainty and danger of the outside world. Over the course of the novel Harry will lose confidence in the ability of authority figures and institutions to protect him or his community, but no matter how much his worldview shifts, his friendships will remain intact and give him confidence to face new challenges.

☞ His eyes burned suddenly and he blinked. He felt stupid for admitting it, but the fact that he had had someone outside Hogwarts who cared what happened to him, almost like a parent, had been one of the best things about discovering his godfather...and now the post owls would never bring him that comfort again...

Related Characters: Harry Potter, Sirius Black

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

Drawing Harry into the Weasleys’ broom shed, Dumbledore praises Harry for the way he’s handling Sirius’s

death months before. His parents' best friend, Sirius provided a parental presence that Harry has never known, not even with the Weasleys; never before has he had an adult in his life whose prime concern is his safety and well-being. It's completely normal to desire such stability and comfort; in fact, most of the novel's characters take it for granted. Harry's feeling that it's "stupid" or shameful to admit how much he relied on Sirius reflects the extent to which he's proceeded through life alone and unguided. It also shows that he considers his emotions a weakness, best hidden from others; this is a conviction that will occur often, especially with regard to Harry's romantic feelings for Ginny. Throughout the novel, Harry's desire to have protective adults in his life will clash with his shame at feeling reliant on anyone and his growing sense that no matter how powerful, no authority figure can protect him from Voldemort.

perilous quest to destroy the Horcruxes. Last night, Harry saw the desire for comfort and support – from Sirius or his friends – as a kind of weakness. However, receiving this support is actually extremely empowering, giving him a sense of confidence without which he might not be able to proceed in fighting Voldemort.

Moreover, it had seemed the right destiny for him since he had heard the prophecy a few weeks ago...Neither can live while the other survives...Wouldn't he be living up to the prophecy, and giving himself the best chance of survival, if he joined those highly trained wizards whose job it was to find and kill Voldemort?

Related Characters: Harry Potter, Lord Voldemort / Tom Riddle

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

The morning that Harry arrives in the Burrow, the trio receive their results from the O.W.L. examinations they took last year. While Harry is generally pleased with his results, he's disappointed that he hasn't scored high enough in Potions to continue as an advanced student; therefore, he won't be able to join the Aurors after graduating Hogwarts. In a departure from previous novels, the last chapter has shown Harry outside of Hogwarts and Privet Drive, conferencing with Dumbledore almost like an adult. However, the stress and furor of receiving test results is a reminder that he and his friends are still very much students, grounded in the rhythms of school life. By the end of the novel, this lifestyle will be shattered, underscoring the trauma amid which they come of age.

Moreover, even though Harry is wary of the Ministry, he still sees himself fighting Voldemort from within it, as an Auror. As the novel goes on, he will completely lose confidence in the ability of governmental institutions to carry out this fight, and develop a much more individualistic conception of his own destiny. While it's liberating to act outside the Ministry's petty political machinations, doing so also contributes to Harry's feeling of being lonely and unprotected.

Chapter Five: An Excess of Phlegm Quotes

Harry did not really listen. A warmth was spreading through him...He knew that Ron and Hermione were more shocked than they were letting on, but the mere fact that they were still there on either side of him, speaking bracing words of comfort, not shrinking from him as though he were contaminated or dangerous, was worth more than he could ever tell them.

Related Characters: Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, Hermione Granger

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

After a good night's sleep at the Burrow, Harry is awakened by Ron and Hermione's excited greetings. He fills them in on the events of last night, and then tells them about Dumbledore's revelation of the prophecy he heard last spring: that Harry must either kill Voldemort or be killed by him. Understandably, this is a source of great anxiety to Harry, and he's been nervous about sharing this information with his friends, but without making a big deal about it, they immediately start cheering him up and speculating on the skills he'll gain from lessons with Dumbledore. Ron and Hermione's refusal to "shrink" from Harry, even when he seems to be a doomed figure, is a touching affirmation of the trio's friendship; it also foreshadows the novel's last episode, in which they instantly agree to join him on his

Chapter Six: Draco's Detour Quotes

☞ It would have been a happy, peaceful holiday had it not been for the stories of disappearances, odd accidents, even of deaths now appearing almost daily in the *Prophet*...To Mrs. Weasley's displeasure, Harry's sixteenth birthday celebrations were marred by grisly tidings brought to the party by Remus Lupin, who was looking gaunt and grim, his brown hair streaked liberally with gray, his clothes more ragged and patched than ever.

Related Characters: Harry Potter, Molly Weasley, Remus Lupin

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

Much like he has in previous years, Harry spends most of the summer with Ron and Hermione at the Burrow. Previously, such occasions have been tranquil and fun; now, however, they're taking on a darker cast. The escalating frequency of disasters reflects Voldemort's rise in the outside world, and the fact that life at the Burrow is punctuated by these catastrophes shows that even the most secure and happy places in Harry's life are not immune to the new danger. In a way, this sense of unease foreshadows the incidents that will occur at Hogwarts, another formerly secure location.

Moreover, the news Lupin brings tonight regards the disappearance of Mr. Ollivander and Florean Fortescue, two shopkeepers in Diagon Alley and fixtures of the Wizarding community. The presence of these two men during his yearly shopping trips has been one of the constants in Harry's life, so their disappearance is indicative of a fundamental shift of the world in which he's lived out his childhood and adolescence. By setting these kidnappings in Diagon Alley, the novel continues to evoke public spaces as sources of anxiety and danger, rather than safety or community.

Chapter Eleven: Hermione's Helping Hand Quotes

☞ "Anyone we know dead?" asked Ron in a determinedly casual voice; he posed the same question every time Hermione opened her paper.

Related Characters: Ron Weasley (speaker), Hermione Granger

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 221

Explanation and Analysis

Arriving at Hogwarts, Harry, Ron, and Hermione settle into what appears to be a school year like any other: they're stressed out over picking class schedules and Harry is gearing up for another year with the Quidditch team. At the same time, the tranquility of Hermione's morning newspaper ritual is disrupted by the increasingly grim character of the news from the outside world. In digesting the onslaught of disasters, Ron clearly forces himself to act tougher than he actually feels. For him, growing up means learning to process the events around him without showing fear or distress, but the evident sense that he's pretending shows how much he's still a young boy, and encourages the reader to sympathize with his anxiety.

Currently, the trio are secure in the knowledge that disaster occurs away from Hogwarts – people die outside the school, not within it – but a series of incidents in Hogwarts will shake this security. The ultimate infiltration of Hogwarts at the end of the novel represents the end of any sense of public safety in the Wizarding world; it also signals the end of the trio's adolescence, insofar as this period of their life is embodied by the stability of their lives as students.

Chapter Fourteen: Felix Felicis Quotes

☞ He and Cho were too embarrassed to look at each other, let alone talk to each other; what if Ron and Hermione started going out together, then split up? Could their friendship survive it?...And then, what if they didn't split up? What if they became like Bill and Fleur, and it became excruciatingly embarrassing to be in their presence, so that he was shut out for good?

Related Characters: Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, Hermione Granger, Cho Chang

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 283

Explanation and Analysis

During one Herbology class, Hermione cuts short Ron's tirade against Slughorn's club of favorites by admitting that she was planning on inviting him to its Christmas party; clearly pleased by this invitation, Ron subsides into silence and the two are exceptionally kind to each other for the rest

of the day. This incident means Harry must confront a possibility he's long suspected, that Ron and Hermione will start dating. At this point, he sees romance as inevitably leading to disaster; their relationship will either break up the friend group or render Harry lonely. It's partly the importance that Harry places on friendship, and the centrality of Ron and Hermione in his life, that makes him see romance in this way. But it's also notable that his only experience in this area his fumbling and short-lived relationship with Cho; just because this relationship failed doesn't mean that more thoughtful or genuine partnerships are also doomed. Right now, Harry is making judgments about romance from a position of emotional immaturity, but over the course of the novel he will learn to see romantic feelings as positive, rather than threatening or shameful.

☝ It was as though something large and scaly erupted into life in Harry's stomach, clawing at his insides: hot blood seemed to flood his brain, so that all thought was extinguished, replaced by a savage urge to jinx Dean into a jelly. Wrestling with this sudden madness, he heard Ron's voice as though from a great distance away.

Related Characters: Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, Ginny Weasley, Dean Thomas

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 286

Explanation and Analysis

Walking towards Gryffindor Tower one afternoon, Harry and Ron walk in on Ginny and Dean making out in a hidden corridor. Harry is not just embarrassed but enraged by this sight; his reaction is the clearest indication so far that he has feelings for Ginny. However, his choice to phrase them metaphorically rather than explicitly shows that he can't articulate these feelings even to himself. Describing his feelings as something "large and scaly" possessing "claws" and urging violence, Harry conceives of his crush as a monster, something that is morally wrong and threatens his personal stability. In fact, wanting to date Ginny is an extremely normal, even positive urge. Harry's tormented language here reflects his belief that strong emotions are embarrassing and destructive, a conviction that hampers him not only from pursuing Ginny but from expressing his grief over dead loved ones like Sirius. As the novel progresses, Harry will transition from this repressive attitude towards a more compassionate stance on others'

emotions and his own.

☝ But unbidden into his mind came an image of that same deserted corridor with himself kissing Ginny instead...the monster in his chest purred...but then he saw Ron ripping open the tapestry curtain and drawing his wand on Harry, shouting things like "betrayal of trust"... "supposed to be my friend"...

Related Characters: Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, Ginny Weasley

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 289

Explanation and Analysis

Witnessing Dean and Ginny kissing forces Harry to openly confront his feelings for his longtime friend. At the same time, Ron's violent reaction to the sight makes him wary of ever pursuing these feelings. In his explosion towards Ginny, Ron demonstrates a sense of entitlement to control his sister's love life and a belief that female sexuality is inherently shameful – he accuses his sister of behaving inappropriately even though she's been kissing her boyfriend in a hidden corridor. Meanwhile, Harry's miserable fantasy displays his own belief that dating Ginny would be "betraying" Ron – in other words, that being romantically involved with a woman is an inherently harmful or aggressive act, which her male relatives should rightly resent.

Both Ron and Harry take rather sexist approaches to romance at this point in their lives, giving more consideration to men who are not involved in the relationship than women who are. Their mindsets contrast starkly with those of Hermione and Ginny, who are assertive and unashamed of going after what they want. Although the fact that Harry and Ginny do end up dating seems to vindicate the women's point of view, in fact Harry's decision to do so is contingent on Ron's "permission," meaning that he still continues to hold these harmful views.

Chapter Sixteen: A Very Frosty Christmas Quotes

☝ I mean, anybody who has actually interviewed him agrees that he's about as much a Death Eater as this Satsuma...but the top levels want to look as though they're making some progress, and "three arrests" sounds better than "three mistaken arrests and releases"...

Related Characters: Arthur Weasley (speaker), Harry Potter, Stan Shunpike

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 331

Explanation and Analysis

As usual, Harry celebrates Christmas with Ron and the Weasleys. Normally, holidays at the Burrow are happy and untroubled – but just as it did during the summer vacation, bad news keeps creeping in. Now, Mr. Weasley updates Harry on the imprisonment of Stan Shunpike, the Knight Bus conductor who has been detained for months. As Harry had suspected, it's increasingly obvious that Stan is not a Death Eater, but keeping him locked up gives the impression that the Ministry is making some headway against Voldemort – just as letting him go would be an acknowledgment of its fallibility. While the Ministry is pretending to serve its constituents, it's actually just deceiving them – and in Stan's case, causing outright harm. Embodying the corruption and inefficiency of the Ministry, Stan's false imprisonment is a watershed moment for Harry, cementing his distrust for the government and spurring him to turn down offers to work within it, such as the one Rufus Scrimgeour will soon make.

☞ “You are determined to hate him, Harry,” said Lupin with a faint smile. “And I understand; with James as your father, with Sirius as your godfather, you have inherited an old prejudice. By all means tell Dumbledore what you have told Arthur and me, but do not expect him to share your view of the matter...”

Related Characters: Remus Lupin (speaker), Harry Potter, Albus Dumbledore, Severus Snape, Sirius Black, James Potter

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 333

Explanation and Analysis

Taking advantage of the presence of older adults during Christmas celebrations, Harry informs Lupin and Mr. Weasley of the argument he recently overheard between Snape and Malfoy. Lupin frames Harry's continued obsession with the two not as a fact-based investigation but a matter of emotional prejudice, which ultimately clouds

Harry's judgment. Notably, Lupin himself has managed to transcend this way of thinking towards Snape, even though the professor has personally harmed him in a number of ways.

For Harry, it may be comforting to think of his hatred of Snape as a prejudice inherited from his father – even if Lupin is referencing it as a flaw. Like other shared characteristics which the two share, it's a connection to a figure who often seems totally inaccessible and lost. At the same time, it's also a link between him and Snape, who often behaves unprofessionally and even cruelly towards Harry due to his longstanding hatred of James. While Harry is reluctant to acknowledge this, the novel shows that even people of radically different moral status can share characteristics that force them to identify with each other.

☞ If you were to be seen popping in and out of the Ministry from time to time, for instance, that would give the right impression. And of course, while you were there, you would have ample opportunity to speak to Gawain Robards, my successor as Head of the Auror office. Dolores Umbridge has told me that you cherish an ambition to become an Auror.

Related Characters: Rufus Scrimgeour (speaker), Harry Potter, Dolores Umbridge

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 345

Explanation and Analysis

As if the tone of the Christmas gathering wasn't uneasy enough, Rufus Scrimgeour pops in unannounced, ostensibly to allow Percy to see his family, but really to corner Harry and ask him to collaborate with the Ministry. It's important to note that he's not actually asking Harry to add his knowledge or skills to the fight against Voldemort – he just wants him to pretend to do so, in order to soothe the public. Building off Harry's earlier discussion with Mr. Weasley about Stan Shunpike, this interaction strengthens the view of the Ministry as incapable of fighting Voldemort and mostly concerned with maintaining its own power.

This interaction also forces Harry to abandon his earlier ambition of combatting Voldemort as an Auror. At the beginning of the novel he idolized this elite fighting squad, but now he sees it as part of a corrupt institution – after all, Scrimgeour with his lack of integrity was once an Auror, and his successor seems to be in favor of this charade. It's becoming more and more clear that working against

Voldemort through current government structures is not possible. Turning away from the Ministry alienates Harry from many of the most powerful adults in his world and makes him feel vulnerable, but it also gives him a better chance of success.

Chapter Seventeen: A Sluggish Memory Quotes

☞☞ “He accused me of being ‘Dumbledore’s man through and through.’”

“How very rude of him.”

“I told him I was.”

...To Harry’s intense embarrassment, he suddenly realized that Dumbledore’s bright blue eyes looked rather watery, and stared hastily at his own knees.

Related Characters: Harry Potter, Albus Dumbledore (speaker), Rufus Scrimgeour

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 357

Explanation and Analysis

After returning to Hogwarts for the second term, Harry reports Scrimgeour’s proposal to Dumbledore. In particular, he emphasizes that he’s aligned himself with the headmaster and refused to betray his confidence to the Minister of Magic. Although Harry is characteristically embarrassed by the professor’s display of emotion, it only confirms what he already feels: that they have been developing an increasingly close relationship over the course of the year, based more on personal loyalty than intellectual discussion or strategic planning.

Even though Harry was disillusioned by his conversation with Scrimgeour and frightened to see that the Ministry has no idea how to fight Voldemort, placing his trust in Dumbledore allows him to distance himself from the government without feeling truly endangered. Even though the Ministry can do nothing about Voldemort, Harry still feels safe in the knowledge that Dumbledore has a plan. His increased personal and psychological dependence on the headmaster foreshadows the existential loneliness and dread that he will feel after Dumbledore’s murder, when he realizes that there’s truly no Wizarding institution that can protect him from Voldemort.

Chapter Twenty-Two: After the Burial Quotes

☞☞ “I am not proud...” he whispered through his fingers. “I am ashamed of what – of what that memory shows...I think I may have done great damage that day...”

“You’d cancel out anything you did by giving me the memory,” said Harry. “It would be a very brave and noble thing to do.”

Related Characters: Harry Potter, Horace Slughorn (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 490

Explanation and Analysis

For months Harry has struggled to induce Slughorn to surrender his important memory about Voldemort’s youth, but after drinking the Felix Felicis potion he’s able to corner the drunk professor at Aragog’s funeral and persuade him. Harry usually categorizes the people in his life as strictly “good” or “bad,” but throughout the year he’s received contradictory moral impressions of Slughorn: he’s a Hogwarts professor trusted by Dumbledore but also a weak man obsessed with prestige and material success. Harry already suspects that the memory he’s about to see emphasizes Slughorn’s worst qualities: he’s so dazzled by Tom Riddle’s talent and flattery that he ignores his bad character and tells him how to make a Horcrux. However, Harry doesn’t use this information to condemn or humiliate the professor. Rather, he holds out the possibility of redemption, showing his belief that Slughorn still has good moral impulses and can choose to exercise them.

It’s important to note that Harry is guided by the potion right now; as his continued antipathy towards Snape will show, he’s still not convinced that character can change or that good actions can atone for previous misdeeds. However, this moment shows that he’s at least considering the principles of redemption that Dumbledore holds so strongly, and thus that his moral universe is becoming more nuanced. Notably, Harry’s words now mirror Dumbledore’s eventual speech to Draco on the Astronomy tower, when he says the boy can atone for his past by switching sides; perhaps his experience with Slughorn helps Harry appreciate Draco’s insecurity and eventually conclude that he would never have killed the headmaster.

Chapter Twenty-Three: Horcruxes Quotes

☞ “Yes, Harry, you can love,” said Dumbledore, who looked as though he knew perfectly well what Harry had just refrained from saying. “Which, given everything that has happened to you, is a great and remarkable thing. You are still too young to understand how unusual you are, Harry.”

Related Characters: Albus Dumbledore (speaker), Harry Potter

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 509

Explanation and Analysis

After viewing Slughorn’s memory, Harry is aghast to learn that he has to track down so many Horcruxes in order to finally kill Voldemort. It seems to him that the Dark wizard has made himself all but invincible. However, Dumbledore argues that by splitting his soul, Voldemort has blunted his emotional capacities and fundamentally weakened himself. Although Dumbledore’s lessons have seemed to emphasize the similarities in Harry and Voldemort’s origins, a crucial difference emerges here: Voldemort is defined by the lack of love and guidance in his early life, whereas Harry was able to transcend his circumstances, find himself a place in a loving family, and forge meaningful friendships.

This passage also highlights the difference between Dumbledore’s and Harry’s conception of emotion. Harry views the expression of emotion – from grief over Sirius’s death to fear about the future – as an embarrassing weakness in himself or others. His reluctance to contemplate his own emotions even leads him to feel guilt and shame over his crush on Ginny. Conversely, Dumbledore argues that Harry’s feelings are his greatest strength, because they give him insight that Voldemort lacks and allow him to forge strong networks to fight his nemesis. Partly through his evolving relationships with his friends and partly through moments like this with Dumbledore, Harry becomes more emotionally mature over the course of the novel.

☞ It was, he thought, the difference between being dragged into the arena to face a battle to the death and walking into the arena with your head held high. Some people, perhaps, would say that there was little to choose between the two ways, but Dumbledore knew – *and so do I*, thought Harry, with a rush of fierce pride, *and so did my parents* – that there was all the difference in the world.

Related Characters: Harry Potter, Albus Dumbledore, Lily Potter, James Potter

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 512

Explanation and Analysis

After viewing Slughorn’s memory, Harry understands the true nature of his mission: he has to destroy the remaining Horcruxes and ultimately do battle with Voldemort. As Dumbledore points out, though, Harry would do this even if it wasn’t prophesied that he or Voldemort must inevitably kill the other – because Harry is a good person devoted to fighting evil, and because Voldemort is so obsessed with finding and killing Harry. This sense of having free will instead of being trapped by destiny gives Harry a feeling of pride here, despite also realizing how incredibly dangerous his path ahead will be.

Harry’s sense of responsibility and danger is especially strong because he’s become so disillusioned with the Ministry, and knows he’ll have to carry out this task by himself. This is a culminating moment in a pattern building throughout the novel, in which Harry realizes both the magnitude of his own role in fighting Voldemort and the inability of other people or institutions to protect him. Usually, these moments of realization inspire fear or anger, but right now he feels proud and almost enthusiastic for the future – possibly because, although he’s not relying on his parents for help, he’s drawing on their example for inspiration. Although the novel generally depicts coming of age as a harsh and traumatic process, here it’s described much more positively.

Chapter Twenty-Five: The Seer Overheard Quotes

☞ “Watch it,” he said, pointing warningly at Harry and Ginny. “Just because I’ve given my permission doesn’t mean I can’t withdraw it – “

“‘Your permission,’” scoffed Ginny. “Since when did you give me permission to do anything?”

Related Characters: Ron Weasley, Ginny Weasley (speaker), Harry Potter

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 536

Explanation and Analysis

After Harry spontaneously kisses Ginny during celebrations for the Quidditch championship, the two finally embark on the relationship they've long desired. For Ginny, this is a strong expression of agency: she takes charge of her own love life, rather than waiting for Harry to make a move. Meanwhile, Harry has to overcome his fear of Ron's anger and realize that being in love with his friend's sister is a positive thing rather than cause for guilt and shame. The ensuing relationship seems to validate Ginny and Hermione's emotional outlook, in which romantic feelings are accepted and acted upon, and men have no role in determining the love lives of their female relatives.

At the same time, it's clear that Harry and Ron haven't abandoned their original views. Harry's new happiness with Ginny depends on having Ron's "blessing," which he received at the end of the last chapter. For his own part, Ron still derives a sense of comfort and power by believing that he has "permitted" the relationship and is in charge of what's going on. These mindsets erase Ginny's agency in determining the course of her own life; moreover, they foreshadow Harry's eventual decision to break up with Ginny for her own "protection," a move that casts her as a passive victim rather than a formidable witch in her own right.

of the chapter shows the extent to which they have abruptly shifted roles.

On one hand, the professor's comment is touching. It expresses the intimacy between teacher and student which has been growing all year and shows that Harry has proved his skills over the course of the night – one reason why Dumbledore brought him on this expedition. But it's also a frightening demonstration that previously formidable authority figures are no longer able to protect Harry, and indeed must rely on *him* for protection. Foreshadowing his imminent death, Dumbledore's remark forces Harry to act like an adult when he still feels like a child.

Chapter Twenty-Seven: The Lightning-Struck Tower Quotes

☞☞ Come over to the right side, Draco, and we can hide you more completely than you can possibly imagine. What is more, I can send members of the Order to your mother tonight to hide her likewise...Come over to the right side, Draco...you are not a killer..."

Related Characters: Albus Dumbledore (speaker), Draco Malfoy, Narcissa Malfoy

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 592

Explanation and Analysis

Once they reach the Astronomy Tower where the Dark Mark is flying, Dumbledore immobilizes Harry under the Invisibility Cloak to protect him from harm; from this position, Harry is able to observe his conversation with Draco Malfoy, who finally reveals that Voldemort has charged him with killing the headmaster. Although Malfoy tries to express bravado and confidence, it's clear that he's still awed by Dumbledore and reluctant to actually kill him. Even in this moment of danger, Dumbledore recognizes this and capitalizes on it. While Harry has treated Malfoy as an irredeemable villain throughout the novel, Dumbledore understands that he's an anxious and scared teenager. In this passage, he displays a belief in Malfoy's ability to transform himself and also emphasizes one of his few good qualities: his loyalty to his parents.

Dumbledore's attitude towards Malfoy is not just generous but strategic: if he convinces Malfoy to switch sides, the boy can be saved and Dumbledore can go through with his original plan, which is to be killed by Snape, not Malfoy. Although Dumbledore ultimately dies on the Astronomy

Chapter Twenty-Six: The Cave Quotes

☞☞ "I am not worried, Harry," said Dumbledore, his voice a little stronger despite the freezing water. "I am with you."

Related Characters: Albus Dumbledore (speaker), Harry Potter

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 578

Explanation and Analysis

When Dumbledore invites Harry to accompany him to obtain one of Voldemort's Horcruxes, the teenager is thrilled at the chance to prove himself. At the outset, Dumbledore is very much in charge of the mission: he tells Harry what to do and is able to deduce the location of Voldemort's secret hideaway simply with his intuition, causing Harry to marvel at the extent of his powers. However, after he drinks the mysterious green potion necessary to retrieve the Horcrux, Dumbledore becomes fundamentally weakened, experiencing terrifying hallucinations and begging Harry for help. Harry has to take charge of their perilous exit from the cave and Apparate unaided for the first time. Dumbledore's remark at the end

tower, Harry does appreciate that Malfoy is far more nuanced than he originally thought, and eventually concludes that he wouldn't have killed the professor. In his last lesson to Harry, Dumbledore upholds his belief in personal redemption, even in the most severe of circumstances.

previously. Moreover, it causes him to feel fundamentally distanced from the adults in his life. This moment is a marked contrast to Harry's realization in Dumbledore's office that he has to face Voldemort bravely like his parents; rather than drawing strength from Lily and James, his loneliness is exacerbated by their inability to protect him.

Chapter Thirty: The White Tomb Quotes

☛☛ ...People who cared about him had stood in front of him one by one, his mother, his father, his godfather, and finally Dumbledore, all determined to protect him; but now that was over. He could not let anybody else stand between him and Voldemort; he must abandon forever the illusion he ought to have lost at the age of one, that the shelter of a parent's arms meant that nothing could hurt him. There was no waking from this nightmare, no comforting whisper in the dark that he was safe really...the last and greatest of his protectors had died, and he was more alone than he had ever been before.

Related Characters: Harry Potter (speaker), Albus Dumbledore, Lord Voldemort / Tom Riddle, Sirius Black, Lily Potter, James Potter

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 645

Explanation and Analysis

After the Death Eaters infiltrate Hogwarts and kill Dumbledore, the entire Wizarding world converges on Hogwarts to mourn him. For Harry, the funeral causes him to reevaluate the entire course of his life, seeing it not as a series of narrow escapes against Voldemort but a succession of losses. Having lost both his most powerful guardian and his confidence in most Wizarding institutions, Harry knows he has to fight Voldemort alone. This realization marks the end of Harry's childhood and the beginning of his life as an adult.

It's important that growing up is a fundamentally unsettling experience for Harry: not only does it present a grim view of the future, it negates the security and happiness he felt

☛☛ ...In spite of everything, in spite of the dark and twisting path he saw stretching ahead for himself, in spite of the final meeting with Voldemort he knew must come, whether in a month, in a year, or in ten, he felt his heart lift at the thought that there was still one last golden day of peace left to enjoy with Ron and Hermione.

Related Characters: Harry Potter (speaker), Lord Voldemort / Tom Riddle, Ron Weasley, Hermione Granger

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 652

Explanation and Analysis

In the novel's last passage, Harry reflects on the uncertain future and his path going forward. The novel has framed Harry's coming-of-age process as a gradual loss of confidence in the ability of adults to protect him, culminating in the murder of the formerly invincible Dumbledore; in this sense it's a traumatic and destructive experience, rather than an empowering one. Harry's feelings of isolation are reflected in his description of the future as "dark and twisting." However, even as he no longer relies on authority figures for protection, he's heartened by Ron and Hermione's decision to accompany him on his journey; the "golden" feelings of "peace" he derives from spending time with his friends contrast with his evocation of a lonely quest against Voldemort. Even though growing up forces Harry into a frightening independence, he can still rely on his friends for companionship and support. As Harry emerges from this fraught school year as an adult, friendship remains as the only protective force in which his confidence is unshaken.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER ONE: THE OTHER MINISTER

Late at night, the Muggle Prime Minister is sitting in his office, waiting for a phone call from another nation's leader. He can't stop thinking about his political opponents, who have been on the news every night explaining why the recent spate of disasters hitting England are his government's fault. The Prime Minister doesn't know how he could've anticipated the freak bridge collapse or the sudden hurricane that have cost scores of lives; and it's not his fault that one of his Junior Ministers has chosen to "quack like a duck" in public. Even the weather reflects his sense of unease: the Prime Minister reflects that "all this chilly mist" isn't normal in the middle of the summer.

As he looks out the window, the Prime Minister hears a polite cough behind him; filled with dread, he turns around to see that a tiny portrait in his office is asking him to accept an "urgent" meeting with Cornelius Fudge. The Prime Minister stammers that it's a bad time, but the wigged man is implacable. Fixing his tie, the Prime Minister hurries to his desk; he tries to look calm and unsurprised as a man appears in his fireplace and steps into the office, holding a lime green bowler hat.

The Prime Minister greets Cornelius Fudge unenthusiastically: generally, visits like this mean bad news. He notices that Fudge is looking "thinner, balder, and grayer" than ever before. Sitting down wearily, Fudge begins to complain about the same disasters that have plagued the Prime Minister: the bridge collapse and hurricane, as well as two "nasty and well-publicized" murders. Surprised, the Prime Minister asks if "your people" were "involved" in these events; without explaining, Fudge asks him sternly if he's "realized what's going on."

The Prime Minister hates Fudge's ability to make him feel "like an ignorant schoolboy," which reminds him of their first meeting. He'd just won the election and was standing in his office when the tiny portrait began speaking to him, just like today. In that moment, the Prime Minister assumes he's gone insane from stress, especially when a "self-proclaimed wizard" emerges from the fireplace to shake his hand and explain the existence of a secret Wizarding world. Fudge assures the Prime Minister that he doesn't have to worry about the Wizarding world, which has its own government; this visit is only a formality, and it's unlikely they'll ever meet again.

It's notable that the novel begins by describing catastrophes affecting the Muggle world which, as readers will soon see, originate with the Death Eaters. The fact that Wizarding conflicts are spilling into the Muggle world creates a sense of unprecedented danger, which will characterize Harry's mood throughout the novel.



The Prime Minister's extreme reluctance to engage with the Wizarding world – and his desire to project a powerful image by situating himself behind a large desk and fixing his clothes – establishes him as reminiscent of the Dursleys, who see magic as inherently opposed to their aspirations to conventional success. Given the Dursleys' negative portrayal, this parallel casts doubt on Muggle Prime Minister's integrity.



Both the Muggle Prime Minister and Cornelius Fudge seem overwhelmed by the crises facing them: Fudge is physically worn down, and the Prime Minister is unable to deduce that the recent disasters are connected to the Wizarding world, despite Fudge's obvious hints. Their mutual incapacity gives the impression that previously trusted governments are ill-equipped to face the newly powerful Voldemort.



It's interesting that the Prime Minister doesn't view Cornelius Fudge in terms of their shared political goals; rather, he only cares about the other man's ability to seem more knowledgeable and powerful than him. As for Rufus Scrimgeour, the new Minister of Magic, the Muggle Prime Minister approaches political life as a means to acquire power and cultivate a respected image, rather than as an opportunity to serve the public.



Completely shocked, the Prime Minister asks why none of his predecessors warned him that this would happen. Chuckling, Fudge asks if he will ever reveal the visit to anyone, and the Minister realizes he can't: people would think he's crazy. After Fudge leaves, the Prime Minister tries to remove the enchanted portrait, but not even a carpenter can pry it off the wall.

For three years the Prime Minister hears nothing from Cornelius Fudge, until he arrives completely flustered in the middle of the night to warn that a killer named Sirius Black has escaped from the wizards' prison, Azkaban. He explains that Black is an accomplice of a dark wizard named Voldemort, who may or may not still be alive. In subsequent years Fudge informs the Prime Minister of mysterious incidents at Wizarding sporting events and even a mass prison breakout. By this time, the Prime Minister has noticed that he's seeing much more of his counterpart than Fudge originally anticipated, and that the "Other Minister" seems more "flustered" with each visit.

Now, the Prime Minister responds testily that he can't possibly know what's going on in the Wizarding world. Brusquely, Fudge says that they have "the same concerns:" in fact, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named has returned, and his followers have caused both the bridge collapse and hurricane, as well as enchanting the Minister's unfortunate Junior Minister.

Trying to seem informed and in charge, the Prime Minister asks if Sirius Black is helping this dark wizard. Sheepishly, Fudge confesses that the Ministry was mistaken about Black all along: in fact, he's recently died during a battle that occurred on Ministry of Magic premises. The Prime Minister feels pity for Fudge, as well as "smugness" that no one has been murdered in any of *his* governmental buildings.

The Wizarding world, says Fudge, is now at war with Voldemort. The Brockdale Bridge collapse was an act of reprisal after Fudge refused to step aside for Voldemort, while the "hurricane" was actually perpetrated by giants working for Voldemort. The Prime Minister is furious to hear that Fudge is "responsible" for a catastrophe for which he's being blamed, but the Minister of Magic assures him that all his Aurors are on the hunt for Voldemort and his followers.

Even though the Prime Minister's conventional personality makes him somewhat hostile to the Wizarding world, it also ensures that he will protect its secrets.



The Prime Minister's limited glimpses of the Wizarding world create a sense of escalating catastrophes which the government is increasingly unable to contain. His observations reflect Harry's increasing feelings of vulnerability and danger throughout the novel. It also encourages the reader to shift from seeing previous books as a series of conflicts in which Harry prevails to a series of disasters through which Voldemort becomes more powerful.



Their willingness – even delight – in causing catastrophe in the Muggle world is one of the things that makes the Death Eaters truly evil, as it involves exercising power over those who can't respond to or even understand it.



Fudge's confession is a reminder of the fallibility – even ineptitude – of government bureaucracy. However, the Prime Minister doesn't see this as a general warning but rather evidence of Fudge's personal weakness, showing his petty approach to political life.



It's telling that the Prime Minister is less worried about the actual catastrophes than his inability to deflect the blame for them. He's obviously more concerned with his own image than the very real dangers facing the people he serves.



With few successes in the fight against Voldemort so far, morale is low in the Ministry – especially since Amelia Bones, head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, has recently been murdered by Death Eaters. Shocked, the Prime Minister mentions that this brutal murder featured prominently in his newspapers as well. Not seeming to listen to him, Fudge continues that the dementors, who have historically guarded the prison of Azkaban and have the magical ability to steal people's souls, have deserted their posts and are now roaming the country at will. The Prime Minister grows faint to think of dementors "spreading despair and hopelessness in his voters."

The Prime Minister scolds Fudge, saying that he has to do something to contain Voldemort; but Fudge ruefully responds that it's no longer his responsibility, as he's been pushed out of his post three days ago. The purpose of his visit now is to introduce his successor. The Prime Minister feels pity. The wigged man in the portrait pipes up that the new Minister of Magic will arrive shortly, after finishing a letter to Dumbledore. Grimly, Fudge mutters that he "wishes him luck" in changing the wizard's mind.

Soon, a second wizard appears in the flames and steps into the office. The new Minister of Magic, Rufus Scrimgeour, looks like an old lion – he seems much tougher and shrewder than Fudge, and it's easy to see why the Wizarding world prefers him in this time of crisis. The Prime Minister resents Scrimgeour's overbearing attitude – he peremptorily begins to discuss new arrangements for the Prime Minister's security – but Scrimgeour points out that it will be a disaster if Voldemort manages to enchant him. Scrimgeour explains that the Minister's new secretary, Kingsley Shacklebolt, is actually an Auror working to protect the Minister.

Moving on, Scrimgeour says that the seemingly insane Junior Minister has been struck by an Imperius Curse, which forces the victim to do the bidding of the spell's caster. He's being treated at St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies, where he's already tried to murder three healers. Finishing his discussion, Scrimgeour prepares to leave, saying that Fudge will keep the Prime Minister abreast of any further developments. Finally collapsing under the strain of these new revelations, the Prime Minister cries out that, as wizards, the other men should be able to "sort out – well – anything." Kindly, Fudge points out that "the other side can do magic too." The two wizards disappear into the fire.

The death of Amelia Bones, a security expert and pillar of government, ushers in a new era of political insecurity and a sense that no one is truly safe from the Death Eaters. These events mirror what's happening in Harry's personal life, as he feels more alone and unprotected than ever. The Prime Minister's description of constituents as "voters," or vehicles to power, rather than people whom he serves, is another indication of his concerns as a politician.



Even though they've emerged as inept and self-centered in the last pages, in this moment Fudge displays good grace and the Prime Minister feels empathy towards his counterpart. This demonstrates a lesson that Harry will learn over the course of the novel – that no one is completely devoid of good qualities.



Scrimgeour projects a more forceful and competent image than Fudge. However, as his later interactions with Harry will show, he's just as inept when it comes to actually fighting Voldemort, and possibly even more self-centered. Scrimgeour demonstrates that an impressive exterior is not always an indicator of good character – something that Harry has long acknowledged when choosing friends and mentors.



Even though the Prime Minister has often bristled at Fudge's condescending and dismissive attitude, in light of recent events, he wants to see Fudge as a powerful figure who can solve anything. Fudge's ironic admission of his inability is the first of several instances in the novel in which trusted authority figures will prove drastically fallible.



CHAPTER TWO: SPINNER'S END

Far away, on the dreary bank of another dirty river, a cloaked woman appears out of thin air, followed by another. Seeing something moving in the bushes, the second woman shoots a jet of green light from her wand – but it's just a fox, which falls dead into the grass. She runs after the first woman, who brushes her away and tells her to return home. Still walking together, the women arrive at a neighborhood of shoddy brick houses. The second woman is disgusted at the prospect of entering "this Muggle dunghill," but the first proceeds into an alleyway, seeking out a specific house.

The second woman grabs her counterpart's arm, saying that she if she talks about "the plan" to anyone, she'll be betraying the Dark Lord's trust. The first woman draws her wand; when the other asks if she would curse her own sister, she says desperately that "there's nothing I wouldn't do anymore." Pursued by her sister, she runs deeper into the maze of houses until she reaches her destination and knocks on the door.

The door opens and Severus Snape greets the first woman as Narcissa and the second, more coldly, as Bellatrix. They enter into a small, inhospitable sitting room, and Narcissa asks if they're alone. With a wave of his wand, Snape causes a hidden door to fly open and reveal a small man listening to their conversation; but Wormtail, he says, will bring them drinks and then return to his room. When the small man returns with three glasses of wine, Snape raises a toast to the Dark Lord.

With a deep breath, Narcissa says that Snape is the only person who can help her, even though she's been told not to discuss "the plan" with anyone. Bellatrix bursts out that it's a mistake to speak to Snape, but Snape calmly invites her to explain the reasons for her mistrust. Passionately, Bellatrix asks where Snape was when the Dark Lord fell and how he spent so many years living "in Dumbledore's pocket," doing nothing to help his previous master or kill Harry Potter.

Smiling, Snape responds that the Dark Lord has asked him each of these questions. He asks if Bellatrix really thinks that she is wiser or cannier than "the greatest wizard" of all time. Snape says that during all the years he's spent at Hogwarts, he's been a spy for Voldemort. After Voldemort fell the first time, he believed him dead – as did many of the other followers working for him today. Now, Snape points out, he has sixteen years of information to give the Dark Lord, while Bellatrix can only present tales of woe from Azkaban.

Although it's not yet entirely clear who these women are, the second one has already demonstrated two instances of pointless wrongdoing: killing an animal for no reason and sneering at the Muggle world. Her character is already starting to seem irredeemably evil, while the other is more complex.



Trying to influence her sister's actions, the second woman invokes two kinds of loyalty: first to Voldemort, and second to family. For her, loyalty to one's family is synonymous with service to Voldemort. Her words are an early indication of this family's skewed values.



This paragraph is monumental, because Snape greets Narcissa and Bellatrix as friends and states his faith in the Dark Lord. Although Dumbledore will affirm his trust in Snape throughout the novel, his actions here better support Harry's suspicions that Snape is a traitor.



It's interesting that Snape's actions are inexplicable both to Death Eaters and to members of the Order of the Phoenix. While Harry can think of many reasons not to trust Snape, to Bellatrix it seems that he's suspiciously loyal to Dumbledore. Of all the novel's characters, Snape is the one whose moral standing is most difficult to define.



In answering Bellatrix's question, Snape plays on her cultish loyalty to Voldemort in order to intimidate her. Her unwillingness to question Voldemort or see him as a fallible person suggests that people are ill-served by blindly trusting sources of authority – whether those sources are established governments or rogue Dark wizards.



Next, Snape explains why he seemed to be aiding Dumbledore throughout the years of Harry Potter's Hogwarts education. He thwarted Quirrell because he didn't know that Quirrell was an agent of Voldemort, and when Voldemort finally summoned him with the Dark Mark, he returned late in order to prove his "loyalty" to Dumbledore. By appearing "unfaithful" in these ways, he's been able to continue his valuable work as a spy. It's not his fault that Voldemort doesn't choose to explain this to Bellatrix.

Enraged, Bellatrix insists that she is Voldemort's favorite disciple. Smirking, Snape asks if this is still the case after the recent disaster at the Ministry; Bellatrix blames these recent events on Lucius Malfoy, and Narcissa interjects that no one should blame her husband.

Finally, Bellatrix demands to know why he hasn't killed Harry Potter yet. Snape admits that, like many of Voldemort's followers, he once thought that, by defeating him, Harry might have proved himself the next great dark wizard. Of course, when the boy arrived at Hogwarts, he revealed himself as "mediocre to the last degree," but by that time Snape was relying on Dumbledore's protection to stay out of Azkaban.

Skeptically, Bellatrix asks if Dumbledore still has no idea of Snape's true loyalties. Snape responds that Dumbledore's "greatest weakness" is his insistence on thinking the best of people, which has made him vulnerable.

Turning to Narcissa, Snape asks what kind of help she needs. Falteringly, she explains that the Dark Lord has entrusted her family with a plan about which she's not about to speak. Snape interrupts that she must obey his commands, provoking a triumphant shout from Bellatrix; however, he continues that he already knows about the plan, and thus can speak of it. When he says he can do little to help her Narcissa begins to cry, whimpering that Draco is her only son. Haranguing her sister, Bellatrix says that she should be proud, and that Draco himself is excited to "prove himself;" but Narcissa points out that he's only sixteen and has "no idea what lies in store."

Narcissa is sure that the Dark Lord has chosen Draco for this project in order to punish Lucius. Snape confirms that the Dark Lord is very angry with Lucius over his failure at the Ministry, and Narcissa falls at his feet, begging him to carry out Draco's appointed task. Calmly, Snape says that he can't contravene the Dark Lord's will; meanwhile, Bellatrix jeers that she would be "proud" to give up her sons to the Dark Lord.

In a sense, Bellatrix considers Voldemort her family. However, because Voldemort has no personal loyalties of his own she's also deeply insecure in their relationship, a feeling which Snape exploits by questioning her value to him. This scene suggests that families in which members are valued according to their utility will never be cohesive or successful.



While Snape and Bellatrix both assert their loyalty to Voldemort above all else, Narcissa is the only one whose primary concern is for her husband and son.



To Bellatrix, Snape provides a narrative of his time at Hogwarts that is diametrically opposed to the one Dumbledore will tell Harry. Considered in different contexts, the same actions can emerge as heroic or evil.



While Snape casts Dumbledore's ability to appreciate moral complexity as a weakness, this is a trait the headmaster will try to encourage in Harry.



Narcissa starkly differentiates herself from her sister by showing that she loves her son more than she cares about serving Voldemort. Bellatrix's ruthless interjections display her inhumanity, but they also emphasize Narcissa's maternal concern, showing that even though she's part of a nefarious family and holds odious views, she still shares the universal feelings of mothers like Mrs. Weasley.



Bellatrix's willingness to see her hypothetical children die shows that she has no sense of the importance of family. As she's a particularly prominent Death Eater, these comments establish Voldemort's army as inherently opposed to the family security that Harry and the Weasleys cherish.



Picking Narcissa up and returning her to her seat, Snape says that he might be able to help Draco along the way. Kneeling before him again, Narcissa begs him to make an Unbreakable Vow to protect Draco, and Snape agrees. He takes Narcissa's hand and, with Bellatrix skeptically performing the magic rituals, promises to watch over Draco, protect him from harm, and if necessary carry out his task. Thick red flames spring from Bellatrix's wand, binding together their clasped hands.

Even though Snape's moral character remains dubious and Bellatrix is still suspicious, his willingness to swear such a serious oath seems to align him firmly with Voldemort and prove that Dumbledore's trust is misplaced. Knowledge of this incident encourages the reader to question Dumbledore's wisdom and competence as he affirms trust in Snape throughout the novel.



CHAPTER THREE: WILL AND WON'T

In a chair next to his bedroom window, Harry Potter is snoring. The room is full of spellbooks, trash, and a pile of newspapers. The paper on top displays an article on Harry himself, wondering whether he is indeed the only wizard who can take on Voldemort. Another article on the front page reports that Rufus Scrimgeour has succeeded Cornelius Fudge as Minister of Magic. Although most of the Wizarding community is happy about this change, it's already rumored that Scrimgeour has fallen out with Albus Dumbledore, one of the community's most respected leaders.

It's interesting that the newspapers' anxious coverage of Voldemort's rise focuses on the hope that various individuals – Scrimgeour, Harry, or Dumbledore – might defeat him singlehandedly. While Scrimgeour's incompetence will cast doubt on this heroic narrative, Dumbledore will eventually conclude that Harry really is the only one who can fight Voldemort – albeit aided by a cohesive team of friends.



Another newspaper displays an article in which the Ministry of Magic urges the Wizarding community to feel safe and secure, especially when sending their children to Hogwarts. The Ministry is taking extra security precautions this year, although they're not discussing them publicly. Nearby is a Ministry leaflet outlining new safety guidelines that all wizards should follow, from never leaving the house alone to reporting suspicious activity in friends and neighbors.

The Ministry's guidelines are vague and not particularly helpful – rather than giving concrete guidelines, they stoke fear. In portraying a government whose actions engender paranoia rather than promoting safety, Rowling may be criticizing the actions of US and UK institutions in the wake of 9/11.



From inside her cage, Hedwig the owl clicks her beak impatiently, but Harry doesn't wake up. In his hand is a note from Professor Dumbledore, communicating that he will pick him up from the house at eleven o'clock. Before falling asleep, Harry had been watching by the window for hours, wondering if the professor would really come; he hasn't even packed yet, feeling that the possibility of rescue from the Dursleys is too good to be true.

Even though Harry trusts and respects Dumbledore, he's still worried that the professor will somehow forget about him. Stemming from the fact that he grew up without a supportive family, Harry's lingering insecurity about the adults who are supposed to take care of him incites the reader's sympathy.



Just as the clock strikes eleven, the streetlight outside goes off and Harry wakes up. Seeing Dumbledore striding up the path, Harry frantically begins throwing possessions into his trunk; after a minute he hears the doorbell ring, and Uncle Vernon begins shouting about the rudeness of calling at this late hour.

Even though their relationship is formal and somewhat distant, by repeatedly stepping in to rescue or take care of Harry, Dumbledore has established himself as a sort of parent figure.



Harry runs downstairs to see Dumbledore politely greeting a dumbfounded Uncle Vernon and stepping without invitation into the house. Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia, now emerging from the kitchen, say nothing, evidently concluding that this man will be “hard to bully.” Undeterred, Dumbledore proceeds into the living room, saying that he has a few matters to discuss before leaving with Harry. When he flicks his wand to bring the couch zooming over to the Dursleys, Harry notices with shock that his hand is “blackened and shriveled.”

With another wave of his wand, Dumbledore produces several glasses of mead. When the Dursleys refuse to drink theirs, the glasses begin tapping the sides of their heads. Briskly, Dumbledore announces that Sirius’s will has been discovered. He’s left everything to Harry, including his house in Grimmauld Place, which the Order of the Phoenix has long used as headquarters. Rudely, Uncle Vernon bursts out in surprise that Harry has inherited a house – Harry has never confided in him about Sirius’s death. Listlessly, Harry tells Dumbledore that the Order can continue using Grimmauld Place; he doesn’t want it.

However, Dumbledore says that the Order has vacated the building. Since Black family tradition decrees that the house must never pass out of the family, they’re worried that some enchantment will kick in to prevent Harry’s ownership. Fortunately, there’s a simple way to test Harry’s claim: with a flick of his wand, Dumbledore summons Sirius’s house-elf, Kreacher, who appears on the floor filthy and screeching his refusal to belong to Harry. Disgusted, Harry says he doesn’t want the elf, but Dumbledore says it’s imperative to keep him away from the other Blacks, given the information he now knows about the order.

When Harry orders Kreacher to shut up, the elf stops shouting, clearly against his will – his forced obedience demonstrates that Harry really has inherited his godfather’s possessions. Dumbledore suggests that Harry send Kreacher to live with the house-elves at Hogwarts, and Harry uncomfortably orders Kreacher away. Harry’s last new possession to dispose of is Sirius’s hippogriff, Buckbeak; as the animal is currently living quite happily with Hagrid, Harry and Dumbledore agree to let current arrangements stand.

To Dumbledore’s amusement, Harry scurries upstairs to finish packing his trunk; he returns with his things to find the professor and the Dursleys sitting in frigid silence. Dumbledore addresses the Dursleys, informing them that with the return of Lord Voldemort, Harry is in more danger than ever – even more than when Dumbledore first left him with the Dursleys, hoping they would care for him as their own child.

In approaching Dumbledore, Uncle Vernon’s first thought is of the power the other man can wield; in this sense, he’s much like the Muggle Prime Minister confronting Cornelius Fudge. Dumbledore’s shriveled hand is an early reminder that despite his power and respected status, he’s an old man and not necessarily invincible.



Hearing about Harry’s inheritance, Uncle Vernon is immediately more interested in his nephew than he’s been all summer. On the other hand, Harry is indifferent to material acquisitions, which do not compensate for Sirius’s death. This contrast highlights the fact that Uncle Vernon approaches family issues with an eye to material concerns, while Harry is motivated by emotional relationships.



The Blacks, an old Slytherin clan, claim to be motivated by extreme family loyalty: they’re famously reclusive and extremely picky about their offspring’s spouses. However, they’re actually bigoted and power-hungry, and their lack of genuine love isolates children like Sirius. Sirius’s background highlights the difference between people who trumpet their concern for their family and people who actually practice family values, like the Weasleys.



Even though Harry technically “owns” Kreacher and could order him to do anything, he’s demonstrably uncomfortable with exercising this power. Harry’s dislike of telling people what to do – even though he has many opportunities to do so – differentiates him from controlling relatives like Uncle Vernon and enemies like Draco, who savor every taste of power they get.



Dumbledore’s speech underscores the new sense of danger that has been brewing ever since the Muggle Prime Minister’s conversation with Fudge. At the same time, the fact that he is actively caring for Harry gives Harry a sense of safety.



Icily, Dumbledore continues that the Dursleys have “never treated Harry as a son.” Rather, Harry has experienced only “neglect and cruelty” from them, although their coldness has at least prevented him from ending up like Dudley. The Dursleys are clearly enraged that Dumbledore views Harry more positively than Dudley.

When he left Harry with the Dursleys, Dumbledore cast a powerful spell that gave Harry magical protection as long as he calls the Dursley’s house “home.” The spell will end when Harry turns seventeen and becomes a man, but Dumbledore asks that the Dursleys allow him to return once before then, so that the magic continues as long as possible. The Dursleys are silent as Harry and Dumbledore leave the house. With a wave of his wand, Dumbledore sends Harry’s belongings ahead to Ron’s house (called “the Burrow”); they have an errand to perform before heading there themselves.

CHAPTER FOUR: HORACE SLUGHORN

Harry feels awkward walking down the road with Dumbledore – especially given that last time he saw Dumbledore he was distraught and furious over Sirius’s death. Dumbledore grips Harry’s arm and Apparates away from the neighborhood to a dark and deserted village. Since Harry has never Apparated before, the sensation confuses him. Walking briskly, Dumbledore asks if Harry’s scar has been hurting him; Harry says it hasn’t, which means that Voldemort has ceased trying to gain access to Harry’s mind.

When Harry asks where they’re going, Dumbledore says that he’s hoping Harry can help persuade an old colleague to return to teach at Hogwarts. Harry isn’t sure how he can do this, but he changes the subject, asking if Dumbledore thinks the new Minister of Magic is a “good” man. Without quite answering the question, Dumbledore says that Scrimgeour is “more decisive and forceful” than Fudge.

Harry wants to know about the argument reported in the *Prophet*, but chooses not to pry. Instead, he asks about Dumbledore’s blackened hand. With a reassuring smile, the professor says it’s a story for another time.

Even though Dumbledore is pointing out the Dursleys’ misdeeds, his cold fury on Harry’s behalf points out that Harry really does have adults in his life who care about him. Even though his biological family has proved insufficient, Harry has cultivated familial relationships with more reliable adults.



The fact that Harry draws tangible protection from having a “home” with the Dursleys reflects the important psychological and emotional protection he receives from the homes he creates for himself at Hogwarts and the Burrow. Dumbledore’s remark foreshadows his later announcement that Harry’s loving relationship with his parents is what enables him to fight Voldemort.



Even though Dumbledore is one of the most trusted adults in Harry’s life, it’s still hard for him to relate to the headmaster on a personal level. The fact that their relationship largely revolves around fighting Voldemort suggests that, while Dumbledore is an invaluable authority figure, he’s not a perfect substitute for a parental figure whose primary concern is Harry’s safety – like Sirius.



One of Harry’s best traits is that he usually evaluates others based on their character, rather than the power they wield. This quality is especially remarkable given that most of the Wizarding world conceives of him in terms of his hypothetical power to fight Voldemort.



Dumbledore’s ability to “reassure” Harry, as he’s done since Harry’s childhood, contrasts with this new evidence of the professor’s fragility.



Harry and Dumbledore turn to discussing the recent Ministry leaflet they've received, sharing a laugh over the useless advice. Teasingly, Dumbledore suggests that Harry should've made him prove he wasn't an imposter by asking his "favorite flavor of jam." Harry asks about the Inferi mentioned in the leaflet, and Dumbledore calmly explains that they are corpses enchanted to fight for a Dark wizard.

Dumbledore draws up before a small house whose front door looks like it was recently torn off its hinges. Full of fear and dread, Harry follows Dumbledore inside to see "a scene of total devastation" – broken chairs, a fallen chandelier, blood on the wallpaper. Harry suggests that the house's owner has been dragged away, but after moving carefully through the wreckage Dumbledore gives a sharp prod to one of the armchairs, which emits a squeal and transforms into a squat elderly man in pajamas.

The man is annoyed that Dumbledore discovered his ruse, but the professor points out that if the Death Eaters really had been there, they would have set the Dark Mark over the house. The two men use magic to reassemble the furniture and return the room to its original state. Having finished, the man glimpses Harry's scar; his eyes widen and he makes a surprised exclamation. Dumbledore introduces them formally, telling Harry that this man is an old colleague named Horace Slughorn.

Turning on Dumbledore, Slughorn says he can't be "persuaded;" but he agrees to pour everyone a drink. Dumbledore kindly asks after Slughorn's health, and the old man complains of various physical ailments – even though, as the professor points out, he must have been very agile to prepare the house so quickly for their arrival. Looking pointedly at Dumbledore's blackened hand, Slughorn says he ought to think about retiring himself. Harry notices that Dumbledore is wearing a new ring with a cracked black stone in its center.

Slughorn admits that he's been moving from house to house and hiding from visitors in order to keep clear of the Death Eaters, who want to recruit him. Dumbledore praises him for his ingenious tactics, but remarks that his life seems very stressful; on the contrary, if he returned to Hogwarts he could enjoy the school's protection. Horace grumbles that he doesn't want to get involved in any of the goings-on at the school – especially with the number of teachers who have left under strange circumstances in past years.

Dumbledore and Harry's mutual disregard for the Ministry leaflet signals their lack of trust in official government institutions and reflects the first chapter's characterization of political leaders as seedy and incompetent.



Even though Harry is filled with dread at the idea of entering a house recently sacked by Death Eaters, he's not entirely surprised. Even at the novel's outset, his worldview has changed to absorb the new disturbances and dangers that accompany Voldemort's rise to power.



Slughorn's immediate recognition of Harry underlines the teenager's celebrity status, which will become increasingly prominent throughout the novel. Despite all the recognition and special treatment he receives, Harry never becomes arrogant and entitled – his lack of concern with material success is one of his best traits, and it positively differentiates him from many other characters.



From his first appearance, Slughorn provides a marked contrast to Dumbledore. Although the two men are of equal age, Slughorn is preoccupied with evading detection, while Dumbledore actively puts himself in harm's way in order to lead the fight against Voldemort.



While Slughorn's evasive attitude and reluctance to commit himself to Dumbledore's side seems like evidence of cowardice, it's also evident that he's taken significant steps in order to avoid joining the Death Eaters, which is itself a sign of bravery and resistance to Voldemort's seemingly inexorable rise.



Dumbledore excuses himself to go to the bathroom and Slughorn turns to Harry, saying that he has his father's looks and his mother's eyes – a comment Harry has heard dozens of times. Harry's mother, Lily, was one of his Slughorn's favorite students. He always wished that she was in Slytherin, the house of which he was Head; catching the look of suspicion in Harry's eyes, he genially warns him not to hold this against him.

Slughorn continues that, given Lily's academic abilities, he couldn't believe she was Muggle-born. Coldly, Harry says that his best friend is both Muggle-born and the best witch in the class. Slughorn clarifies that he's not "prejudiced" – in fact, many of his favorites are Muggle-born. He points to a collection of photos on a dresser, which display former students who have become powerful in the Ministry or the Wizarding bank, Gringotts, or have achieved fame as writers or Quidditch players. Slughorn brags that they all remember the ways he helped him and they frequently send him presents – although, since he's in hiding, it's been hard to receive the gifts.

Slughorn seems a little surprised to hear himself speak about the loneliness of life in hiding. Still, he says, it's wiser to live like this than to join the Hogwarts staff and tacitly declare loyalty to the Order. Harry feels disdainful of Slughorn's timidity – especially when contrasted to Sirius's bravery and the hardship he himself endures – but he points out that most Hogwarts teachers aren't in the order. None of them have been killed except for Quirrell, who was working with Voldemort and "got what he deserved." As long as Dumbledore is Headmaster, the teachers are probably safer than anyone else.

Dumbledore returns from the bathroom and pleasantly announces that it's time to leave. Just as they're leaving the house, Slughorn runs after them and shouts that he wants the job, after all. Dumbledore laughs and congratulates Harry as they walk away, although the boy doesn't understand how he helped at all.

When Dumbledore asks Harry's opinion on Slughorn, the boy doesn't know how to respond. Dumbledore fills the silence by explaining Horace's background: he's always been attracted to "the company of the famous, the successful, and the powerful." While he doesn't seek limelight himself, he likes to feel that he influences people; as a Hogwarts teacher he had an "uncanny knack" of identifying students who would achieve great success and cultivating them as favorites. Dumbledore says that when he returns he will surely try to "collect" Harry, and he warns Harry to be on guard.

Slughorn clearly values Lily's intellectual gifts, but he's also the former Head of Slytherin, Hogwarts' most nefarious House. Everything that Slughorn says makes it impossible for Harry to form a definitive moral impression of the older man.



Despite his assurances to the contrary, Slughorn's disbelief that so many of his successful students are Muggle-born shows that he does harbor some ingrained prejudice. Moreover, his evident regard for students who have achieved fame or power after Hogwarts testifies to his preoccupation with material success – a trait that makes him fascinated with Harry but also differentiates him starkly from the teenager.



Harry's disdain for Slughorn is somewhat justified, given the heroic examples like Sirius to whom he compares the old professor. However, by insisting on holding everyone to impossibly high standards, Harry reveals his black-and-white conception of moral character. This trait is further highlighted by his ruthless dismissal of Quirrell and refusal to concede that the professor may have had some redeeming qualities.



Harry doesn't understand that, as a famous and somewhat glamorous figure, he's the best enticement for Slughorn to return to Hogwarts.



Just as he did during their conversation about the Minister of Magic, Dumbledore encourages Harry to evaluate people based on character rather than material power. However, it's important that Dumbledore doesn't share Harry's judgmental attitude towards Slughorn; here, he enumerates the professor's traits without making an explicit moral judgment.



After another unsettling Apparition, Harry and Dumbledore arrive at the Burrow. Just looking at the building and knowing that Ron and Mrs. Weasley are inside makes Harry feel calm and cheerful. However, Dumbledore guides Harry into a broom shed for a conference before they part.

First, the professor commends Harry on how he's handling Sirius's death. After hearing Uncle Vernon refer to this tragedy so callously, Harry doesn't want to discuss it; but Dumbledore looks at him levelly and expresses his sorrow that Harry had so little time with his godfather. Harry suspects that Dumbledore knows he spent his entire time at the Dursleys lying on his bed and refusing to eat. He doesn't want to admit how much it meant to him to know that someone cared about him "almost like a parent," and how hard it is to lose that comforting presence.

Harry tells Dumbledore that Sirius wouldn't have wanted him to "crack up." The best way to honor his godfather is to take down Voldemort. Dumbledore commends him on his sentiments, saying he's talking like his father's son.

Next, Dumbledore brings up the *Daily Prophet*, which has been reporting various rumors about a prophecy discovered last spring at the Ministry of Magic. No matter how much they pretend to know, only Harry and Dumbledore have actually heard the prophecy, which states that neither Harry nor Voldemort can live while the other survives. Dumbledore warns Harry not to speak freely about the prophecy but suggests he tell Ron and Hermione. Although doing so might entail confessing that he is "worried and frightened," the professor points out that Sirius would not have wanted Harry to "shut himself away" from his friends.

Changing the subject, Dumbledore says that this year he will be giving Harry private lessons. Harry is eager to know what he'll be learning, but Dumbledore keeps mysteriously quiet. He warns Harry that this year he must be especially vigilant about safety, keeping his [Invisibility Cloak](#) with him at all times. He must also keep close to the Burrow, which has been given high security protection by the Ministry; the Weasleys have suffered inconvenience for Harry's sake, and while they don't mind at all, it would be thoughtless of Harry to risk his life while staying with them.

The Burrow, which represents friendship and family, is a marked contrast to Slughorn's lonely abode, populated only by photos of famous students.



Even though Harry's behavior towards his friends and the Weasleys shows that he values family above all else, he also sees his reliance on parental figures as a weakness. In this sense, he's eerily similar to Voldemort, who never trusts anyone. However, while Voldemort allows this impulse to fundamentally isolate him, Harry overcomes it to forge meaningful relationships.



Instead of openly letting himself grieve, Harry reacts to Sirius's death by putting on a brave and adult face that doesn't necessarily feel natural.



The fact that only Harry and Dumbledore are aware of the prophecy heightens the sense that it's only they, rather than the government, who are fully in the know about Voldemort's motivations. Even though Dumbledore encourages Harry to think of himself as central in the fight against Voldemort, he also exhorts him to cultivate a close circle of friends with whom he can fight the Dark wizard.



Even though the Ministry has given the Burrow powerful protections, Dumbledore doesn't consider Harry completely safe. These additional security warnings from Dumbledore heighten Harry's sense of danger and vulnerability, as well as the inability of government institutions to provide meaningful protection.



CHAPTER FIVE: AN EXCESS OF PHLEGM

When Dumbledore knocks on the Burrow's door, Mrs. Weasley answers nervously before welcoming them in. She's been sitting in the kitchen with Nymphadora Tonks, a young member of the Order of the Phoenix who looks thin and unwell. At Harry's arrival she gets up to leave, turning down Mrs. Weasley's invitations to dinner the following weekend. Dumbledore follows on her heels.

Steering Harry to the kitchen table, Mrs. Weasley clucks over his height and thinness. As she pours him a bowl of delicious soup, Hermione's cat Crookshanks jumps onto Harry's knee; he's glad to know that she's already arrived at the Burrow.

Knowing about Harry's earlier errand, Mrs. Weasley reminisces about her own days at Hogwarts with Slughorn; she says that he's "good at giving leg ups," especially in the Ministry, but has never taken much interest in Mr. Weasley. Still, she continues with pride, Mr. Weasley has just been promoted to head the newly-created Office for the Detection and Confiscation of Counterfeit Defensive Spells and Protective Objects. Ever since Voldemort's return, unscrupulous people have been selling false protective charms and amulets; Mr. Weasley's job is to regulate this black-market industry.

In fact, Mr. Weasley is so busy that he's still at work. Wondering where he is, Mrs. Weasley turns to the magical clock whose hands state the whereabouts of each family member. Currently, each one points to "in mortal peril," but Mrs. Weasley says with forced casualness that every wizard is in danger now.

Suddenly, the hand representing Mr. Weasley switches to "traveling;" soon, there's a knock on the door. Mrs. Weasley rushes to answer it, but her husband wearily reminds her to ask the security question to make sure it's really him. Mrs. Weasley asks what his "dearest ambition is," and he responds that he wants to find out how airplanes stay up. Next, he asks what his private nickname for her is; reluctantly and clearly embarrassed at Harry's presence, she whispers that it's "Mollywobbles."

Satisfied, Mr. Weasley enters the house and shakes hands with Harry. He tells Mrs. Weasley about the latest fraud he's identified: medallions that are supposed to allow their wearers to transform their appearance but actually just turn people orange. Seeing Harry yawn, Mrs. Weasley sends him up to bed; he's been given Fred and George's room, as they now live in a flat above their joke shop. Harry changes into his pajamas and falls asleep as soon as he lays down in the bed.

Although the Burrow has always been a place of warmth and safety, tonight Mrs. Weasley and Tonks both seem distinctly ill-at-ease. For Harry, growing up means losing his instinctive faith in the places that have long sheltered him from danger.



Even as the Burrow seems changed by the new dangers, Mrs. Weasley's character remains stolid and unchanged, reminding Harry that his friendships persist despite Voldemort's return.



The fact that Slughorn never took notice of Mr. Weasley speaks negatively about his character; after all, Ron's father is one of the most trusted adults in Harry's life. Lacking in wealth or material status, the Weasleys often slip beneath the notice of people with priorities like Slughorn. Harry's respect and value for the family is a testament to his own character.



Voldemort's rise creates new insecurity not just within governmental structures but among family units.



Mr. Weasley's insistence on following Ministry security guidelines highlights the new dangers that attend even the most basic aspects of family life. At the same time, the comic nature of this exchange shows how pointless and unhelpful these guidelines really are.



In his new position, Mr. Weasley apprehends people who are profiting off the general paranoia. In alluding to crimes like this, Rowling might be critiquing people who used anxiety about terrorism in the wake of 9/11 for personal or ideological gain.



In the morning, he wakes up suddenly to Ron and Hermione's exuberant entrance. Sitting down on his bed, they quiz him on his journey and his stay with the Dursleys. Harry notices Hermione scrutinizing him and knows she's looking for signs of grief over Sirius. Harry tells them that he accompanied Dumbledore to persuade an old teacher to return to Hogwarts – he doesn't know how he feels about Slughorn, but Slughorn can't be worse than Professor Umbridge, who taught Defense Against the Dark Arts last year.

Looking grumpy, Ron's sister Ginny enters the room and says she knows someone who's "worse than Umbridge." Hermione rolls her eyes in agreement and says that "she's so full of herself." Harry thinks that they're complaining about Mrs. Weasley and is astonished by this rudeness. Just then, the door opens to reveal a young and beautiful blonde woman, carrying a breakfast tray for Harry. When she greets him effusively he recognizes her as Fleur Delacour, one of the contestants in the Triwizard Tournament, but he has no idea why she's staying here.

Glowing with pleasure, Fleur announces that she and Bill Weasley are going to be married; she's staying at the Burrow for a few days in order to get to know his family, but there's not much for her to do, as she's not interested in "cooking and chickens." Hermione, Ginny, and Mrs. Weasley all look grimly away from each other.

When Fleur breezes out of the room, Mrs. Weasley complains that Bill is rushing into an engagement because of all the panic about Voldemort. Ginny counters that Bill likes the adventure and glamor that "Phlegm" provides, and Harry and Hermione laugh. Ron looks punch-drunk, clearly overwhelmed by Fleur's magical attraction. Hermione tells him that he's pathetic.

Ginny posits that Mrs. Weasley is trying to break up the engagement by constantly throwing Bill and Tonks together. When Ron argues that Bill will never ditch Fleur for someone "okay-looking" like Tonks, the girls take offense, pointing out that Tonks is much nicer and more intelligent than Fleur. Harry puts in that Fleur is intelligent too, but when Ginny turns on him, he wishes he hadn't spoken.

Anyway, Ron says, Tonks seems increasingly depressed lately. Hermione thinks that she's experiencing "survivor's guilt" over Sirius's death, to the point that she's having trouble changing her appearance. This conversation is interrupted when Mrs. Weasley enters and demands that Ginny come downstairs to help her – she clearly doesn't want to be alone with Fleur.

While both of Harry's friends are delighted to see him, it's Hermione who's truly cognizant of Harry's emotional state. She's just trying to be mindful of his feelings, but Harry thinks that showing his grief is a sign of weakness, and he sees her actions as overbearing or embarrassing. Harry's unwillingness to confront his own feelings is a sign of his emotional childishness, especially compared to Hermione's maturity.



Hermione and Ginny are united in their dislike of Fleur, while both Harry and Ron will be taken in by her supernatural attractions. On one level this is a sign of the women's greater emotional maturity. On the other hand, while Hermione usually forces Harry to modify and soften his character analyses, in moments like this it's clear that she, too, is capable of judging others harshly.



Beautiful, stuck-up, and condescending, Fleur seems antithetical to the Weasleys' values and characters. However, this picture of her character will evolve over the novel, teaching Harry that snap character judgments are not always accurate.



Ron's obvious infatuation with Fleur reflects his rather childish approach to romance. Hermione's frustration foreshadows the rejection and betrayal that she'll feel due to Ron's behavior for much of the novel.



Ron seems to consider it both obvious and acceptable that men judge prospective partners primarily on their looks. Comments like this are early indicators of the chauvinism that will govern his treatment of Ginny and Hermione for much of the novel.



Unlike Ron, Hermione is both intuitive and unabashed in discussing other people's feelings – even though, in this case, she hasn't identified the true source of Tonks' depression.



Ron updates Harry on Fred and George's new joke shop, which has turned out to be wildly successful. Meanwhile, Percy Weasley is still estranged from the family, even though his bosses at the Ministry proved drastically wrong about Voldemort's return.

Suddenly remembering last night's most important development, Harry shares that Dumbledore is going to give him personal lessons. Ron and Hermione are impressed. Harry says that he suspects the lessons have to do with the prophecy, and he admits to his friends the terrifying revelation that he must either kill Voldemort or be killed by him. As they're all staring at each other in silence, there's a sudden bang – Hermione has picked up one of the joke toys still in the room, and it punched her in the face.

Ignoring her new black eye, Hermione looks sympathetically at Harry and asks if he's scared. Ron points out that Dumbledore wouldn't be giving Harry lessons if he didn't have a chance, and Hermione starts speculating about the kinds of spells he might learn. Harry isn't really listening to her, but the mere fact that his friends are comforting him instead of "shrinking from him" is "worth more than he could ever tell him."

Suddenly, Harry remembers Dumbledore mentioning that their O.W.L. results would likely arrive today. When she hears this, Hermione frantically runs downstairs to check the mail. When Harry goes down, he finds her pacing in agitation while Mrs. Weasley tries to remove her bruise and Fleur looks on smugly. When Ron tries to comfort her, she wails that she knows she failed every test. Fleur starts to talk about how the examination system at her school was better.

Harry sees three owls heading toward the Burrow, and Hermione grips him and Ron tightly. With trepidation, Harry opens the envelope addressed to him: he's achieved a perfect score in Defense Against the Dark Arts and only failed two classes, History of Magic and Divination. Ron is satisfied with his grades, and Hermione has received the highest marks in all but one class. Harry knows he should be happy, but he knows that because of his grade in Potions he won't be able to qualify as an Auror (Ministry wizards trained to fight Death Eaters). It's the end of a dream he's always harbored.

While Percy is more conventionally successful than Fred and George, his values aren't in alignment with those of his family.



Although Harry, Ron, and Hermione have faced Voldemort and his minions several times, this is the first time they've received external "confirmation" that Harry must defeat the Dark Lord. Knowledge of the prophecy adds a new dimension of adult responsibility to the conflict in which they've been engaged since childhood.



As always, it's his steadfast friendships that allow Harry to face the many challenges in his life. His gratitude for Ron and Hermione shows that, for him, trust and loyalty are the most important components of friendship – unlike Slughorn, Harry doesn't care about the material benefits that friendship can bring him. At the same time, it's clear that the secure and homey atmosphere of the Burrow helps Harry develop his genuine character.



Hermione's preoccupation with her grades – despite her superior intelligence – has long been at the core of her character. Her anxiety now shows that, despite the new challenges facing her, she's still grounded in the safe universe of her childhood. After all, O.W.L. results are the most important worry facing her.



Even though Harry's not an excellent student, his high mark in Defense Against the Dark Arts shows that he's developing the skill and confidence to fight Dark forces. It's also interesting that Harry envisions himself fighting Death Eaters as part of an established institution – the Ministry Aurors. By the end of the novel, he'll have broken with the Ministry and developed a much more independent conception of his role in the fight.



CHAPTER SIX: DRACO'S DETOUR

For the next several weeks, Harry relaxes at the Burrow and plays Quidditch with Ron, Hermione, and Ginny. However, the peaceful summer is often interrupted by grim stories of disappearances and death in the *Daily Prophet*. On Harry's sixteenth birthday, Remus Lupin, his father's old friend, arrives with news of new dementor attacks, as well as the murder of a Death Eater, Igor Karkaroff, who tried to desert. Bill Weasley brings up the recent disappearances of Florian Fortescue and Mr. Ollivander, both storeowners in Diagon Alley and fixtures of the Wizarding community.

Soon afterward, the students' booklists arrive from Hogwarts. With pleasant surprise, Harry finds out that he's been made Quidditch Captain. The letters mean that the family has to buy supplies at Diagon Alley, a trip Mrs. Weasley has been dreading, as it might expose them to danger. On the appointed day, a special Ministry of Magic car arrives to transport them – an extra measure taken for Harry's security.

This year the Leaky Cauldron, Diagon Alley's most popular pub, is grim and empty. Harry and the Weasleys pass through to find that Hagrid is waiting to accompany them on their shopping and provide extra security. Everything about the alley is changed: all the window displays have been replaced by Ministry of Magic posters displaying the faces of wanted prisoners. Seedy-looking wizards are selling protective amulets, which Mr. Weasley eyes with anger and distrust. Shoppers stay in groups and don't stop to talk to each other.

With Mrs. Weasley's reluctant permission, the group splits up: Ginny and her parents go to the bookstore, while Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Hagrid set off to buy new robes. When the trio enters Madam Malkin's shop, they find Draco and his mother inside, bickering. As soon as Draco notices them, he calls Hermione a Mudblood and sneers at her black eye. When Harry and Ron draw their wands, Narcissa threatens to destroy them if they ever harm Draco. Tauntingly, Harry asks if she's going to "get a few Death Eater pals to do us in." Hermione tells them to put away their wands.

Unfazed, Narcissa says that Harry derives his false sense of security from Dumbledore, who won't always be there to protect him. Harry says she should try to attack him now; then she can join her "loser of a husband" in Azkaban. Draco snarls at him not to insult his mother. Madam Malkin timidly tries to defuse the situation, but Draco and Narcissa simply storm out of the shop.

Recalling previous happy summers spent at the Burrow, these weeks evoke a sense of safety and encourage Harry to see himself as situated within his childhood world. At the same time, the disappearance of several fixtures of the Wizarding world makes the cracks in this world even more apparent. Here, Harry's halcyon youth clashes with the uncertain world in which he comes of age.



The fact that a public space at the center of the Wizarding world is no longer secure emphasizes the gravity of Voldemort's rise – it also reflects post-9/11 concerns about the safety of public spaces and the new feelings that civilians are in danger as they live out their daily lives.



The Ministry's large and threatening posters do little to apprehend escaped prisoners, but they do stoke fear in shoppers. Meanwhile, people selling fake amulets on the black market prey on that fear. Scenes like this show how the anxiety caused by external terrorism can cause a society to disintegrate from within.



Draco's appalling treatment of Hermione is one of the worst aspects of his character – calling her a "Mudblood," he uses the Wizarding equivalent of a racial slur. Remarkably, it's Hermione who's usually willing to believe the best of Draco and who prevents Harry from escalating situations like this one. Hermione's ability to view people independently of their treatment of her is one of her greatest strengths.



In the second chapter, Narcissa appeared as a powerless and anxious mother; however, here she's actively promoting her husband's Death Eater agenda. Like many other characters in this novel, her moral status and claim to the reader's sympathy is never quite clear.



After buying their robes and stopping at the Apothecary, the group makes a quick detour to see Fred and George's new shop. Alone among the storefronts, Weasley's Wizard Wheezes is bedecked with bright posters and flashing displays. It's full of customers inspecting the twins' joke products. Even Hermione is impressed with the caliber of their magic.

Showing him around the shop, Fred and George show Harry their more "serious" products, like hats that protect their wearers against jinxes and Instant Darkness Powder. Even the Ministry is now buying them. In gratitude for the loan Harry gave them to start the shop (his winnings from the Triwizard Tournament), the twins tell him to take anything he wants. They head off to show a skeptical Ginny and Hermione their range of love potions, teasing their sister that, as she already has "about five boys on the go," she doesn't need any.

As Ginny scolds the twins to mind their own business, the trio glimpses Draco outside, hurrying down the street alone. Harry knows there must be some special and nefarious reason for Draco to escape his mother, so he pulls out his Invisibility Cloak and wraps it around his friends. Quickly, they exit the store and follow Malfoy as he turns into Knockturn alley and enters Borgin and Burkes, a secondhand shop specializing in "sinister objects." As they look in the window, Ron produces an Extendable Ear he's grabbed from the twins' shop and unravels it so they can hear the conversation.

Inside, Draco is surveying a large black cabinet and asking Borgin if he can fix a certain object without seeing it. When Borgin is hesitant, Draco moves close to him and shows him something. He warns Borgin not to sell the cabinet; a "family friend," Fenrir Greyback, will be dropping by to ensure Borgin's loyalty. Looking pleased, Draco breezes out of the shop.

The trio are puzzled by the entire conversation. Before the others can stop her, Hermione slips out from the cloak and strolls into the shop. Lying to Borgin that Draco is her friend, she claims she wants to buy him a birthday present and asks if there's anything he particularly liked. Borgin sees through this story and orders her out. She and Ron bicker about her failed ruse all the way back to Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes, where they have to convince Mrs. Weasley that they'd been browsing in the back room the entire time.

Although Fred and George sometimes seem like frivolous pranksters, by remaining level-headed about new dangers and reminding people of their old lives, they're actually helping to counteract government-induced paranoia and performing a public service.



This passage recalls the fact that the twins started their store with Harry's winnings from the Triwizard Tournament – again reminding the reader how little Harry cares about wealth or material status symbols. Meanwhile, although the twins' comments on Ginny's relationships are less ham-handed than Ron's later pronouncements, they reflect a sense of entitlement to judge and meddle in their sister's love life.



On one level, it's Harry's predisposition to judge Draco that eventually leads him to discover what "task" his nemesis has been assigned by Voldemort. On the other hand, his eagerness to classify people as either good or evil is his major flaw. Throughout the novel, Harry's behavior towards Draco highlights the clash between these two impulses.



Even though Draco is a teenager, he's somehow able to bully and intimidate the adult and experienced Borgin. Like Harry, Draco is also developing an adult persona and taking a more active role in the conflict gripping the Wizarding world.



While Hermione's innocent and harmless persona has gleaned critical information for the trio before, this time the ruse fails. This is an indicator that Harry will have to develop more complex – and perhaps more dangerous – methods in order to keep up with a newly emboldened Draco. Ron and Hermione's bickering foreshadows the stormy quality of their relationship this year.



CHAPTER SEVEN: THE SLUG CLUB

Harry can't stop thinking about Malfoy's excursion to Knockturn Alley, but to his frustration, Ron and Hermione don't find it as suspicious as he does, pointing out that there could be lots of explanations for Malfoy's behavior. Harry believes that Malfoy wants to get revenge for his Lucius's imprisonment in Azkaban.

Suddenly, it occurs to Harry that Draco has replaced Lucius as a Death Eater in Voldemort's army, but Ron and Hermione dismiss this possibility, saying that Voldemort wouldn't want an accomplice so young. Undeterred, Harry points out that Draco slapped Madam Malkin when she touched his arm, where the Dark Mark would be tattooed; it's also possible that the frightening thing he showed Borgin was indeed this sign of his affiliation.

Annoyed, Harry stalks downstairs, where Fleur is musing to a bad-tempered Mrs. Weasley about her wedding plans and potential colors for the bridesmaids' dresses. Seeing Harry, Mrs. Weasley cuts her off and briefs him on security preparations for tomorrow's journey to Hogwarts. Harry remarks that he wishes Tonks were part of their security battalion, and Fleur remarks absently that Tonks has "let 'erself go."

After a kiss goodbye from Fleur, Harry sets off to Kings Cross Station the next day with the rest of the Weasleys. An intimidating team of Aurors is there to guide them through the brick barrier to Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$. Before getting on the train, Harry takes Mr. Weasley aside and confesses what he saw in Diagon Alley and his suspicions about Draco. Mr. Weasley seems manifestly unconvinced that Draco is up to anything bad and ushers him back onto the train, where Mrs. Weasley reminds him to be good and stay safe.

Since Ron and Hermione are prefects and have to patrol the train, and Ginny is off to meet her boyfriend Dean, Harry has to find a compartment by himself. Walking down the hall, he's disturbed to see groups of "mesmerized girls" looking at him, and he is relieved to finally meet Neville and Luna. Having been with Harry at the Ministry last year, even they are getting a certain amount of attention.

Both Harry and Malfoy are motivated in part by the desire to avenge their fathers, whom they consider wrongly harmed by the other's side in the conflict. In this sense, the two rivals are very similar.



Ron and Hermione can't fathom the idea of Draco as a Death Eater because it would involve acknowledging that he has an adult role in Voldemort's army – and, accordingly, that they must take on adult roles in the fight against him.



Fleur doesn't appear at her best here – as Lavender will later do to Hermione, she tears other women down based on their physical appearance. While Fleur is characterized negatively now, later events will encourage the reader to revise opinions formed at this juncture.



Like Ron and Hermione, Mr. and Mrs. Weasley are unable to conceive of their children's generation becoming active and independent players in this conflict. Mr. Weasley's deft reassurances and Mrs. Weasley's maternal admonitions reflect their confidence that they can still protect their children. This also shows their reluctance to see them take on adult roles.



Rather than anticipating or exploiting his celebrity status, Harry is bewildered and displeased by it. His behavior now shows that his character is strong and genuine enough to resist change after the acquisition of fame and power. This makes him inherently different from characters like Voldemort, who are completely shaped by the power they possess.



As they're settling down, a group of stylish fourth-year girls enters the compartment, inviting Harry to ditch Neville and Luna and sit with them. Coldly, Harry responds that he wants to stay with his friends. With her characteristic honesty, Luna remarks that people expect him to have cooler friends than them, but Harry retorts that they're the people who always stick by him.

As Neville chatters about the upcoming year, Harry muses that the infamous prophecy could have applied to Neville, as well – both boys were born in July of the same year and had parents in the Order of the Phoenix. By choosing to believe that it referred to Harry, Voldemort made him into the “Chosen One” and doomed his parents. He wonders what his life would be like if the Dark Lord had targeted Neville instead. Perhaps he would have kissed his own mother at the platform, instead of Mrs. Weasley.

Soon, Ron and Hermione enter the compartment. Ron complains that Draco is sitting with the other Slytherins instead of doing his duty as a prefect. Since Draco usually loves bullying younger students Harry feels that he must be up to something; but before he has time to think about it, a third-year arrives with a note from Slughorn, inviting Harry and Neville to come to his compartment for lunch.

Although Harry looks for Draco along the way, he can't catch a glimpse. Instead, he notices that many students are going out of their way to look at him – all except Cho Chang, who darts away as he approaches to talk with her friend Marietta. Harry smirks to see the layer of pimples across Marietta's face.

Arriving in Slughorn's compartment, Harry and Neville find it populated by a couple of Slytherins, a popular boy named Cormac McLaggan from Gryffindor, and – strangest of all – Ginny, grimacing in a corner. It's clear that Slughorn has invited many of them because of their famous relatives. He frowns in displeasure when one boy admits that his father doesn't get along well with his successful uncle, but encourages Cormac to talk about his family's tight relationship with Rufus Scrimgeour. Harry feels bad for Neville when Slughorn interrogates him about his parents, who were both tortured into insanity by Death Eaters.

Rather than cultivating sycophantic acolytes, Harry stands by the “uncool” friends who have always been loyal to him. Harry's sense of reciprocal friendship is another difference between him and Voldemort, who sees those who help him as servants and pawns.



Harry's reflections here are very poignant, showing his longing for a stable family life and emphasizing that his parents are far more important to him than the unique status he's derived from becoming the “Chosen One.” It also displays his humility – rather than conceiving of himself as destined to fight Voldemort, Harry knows that his position now stems from one of many interpretations of the fateful prophecy.



Slughorn's invitations – which differentiate “exceptional” students from the rest – will prove divisive throughout the year. In contrast, Harry's tendency towards inclusivity allows him to develop strong networks of friends who are always ready to help him.



Harry feels that Marietta deserves long-lasting shame and punishment for having betrayed Dumbledore's Army last year. His unwillingness to sympathize with or pardon those who have done wrong is one of the troubling aspects of his character.



Harry judges families by the extent to which they support and care for their members – accordingly, he loves the Weasleys and steers clear of the Dursleys. In contrast, Slughorn views families in terms of the wealth and prestige they cultivate. Students like Cormac who come from families holding these priorities will often prove deeply flawed or unpleasant.



To Harry's intense embarrassment, Slughorn turns eagerly to him and comments on his unwanted new moniker, "The Chosen One." When a Slytherin coughs in disdain, Ginny pipes up to defend Harry. Slughorn continues to pump Harry for information about his exploits at the Ministry last year, but Harry stays quiet. Staunchly, Neville and Ginny say that there's no prophecy and that the *Daily Prophet* is reporting rubbish. Disappointed, Slughorn changes the topic to one of his other famous former students.

Neville, Harry, and Ginny are relieved when they can finally slip away. Ginny explains that Slughorn invited her because he saw her expertly hexing Zacharias Smith, who had been pestering her for information about the Ministry. Seeing someone open the door to Draco's compartment, Harry whips on his Invisibility Cloak and darts in, as well. Although he thinks Draco catches sight of him for a second, he's able to hoist himself into the luggage rack. Draco is lying languidly across a seat with his head in Pansy Parkinson's lap.

Seemingly angry not to be invited, Draco quizzes Blaise Zabini about Slughorn's lunch. He's disgusted that Neville and Ginny, a "blood traitor," were there. To cover up his resentment, Malfoy brags that he might not even be at Hogwarts next year; he's planning to move on to "bigger and better things." Seeing how impressed Pansy is, he continues that the Dark Lord won't care about anyone's grades, only about "the level of devotion he was shown." Draco hints that he's already been given some sort of job, but doesn't explain anything further.

Waiting for a good moment to leave the carriage, Harry draws his wand. But after the other Slytherins leave, Malfoy steps back into the compartment and jinxes Harry, paralyzing him. He steps on Harry's nose, breaking it, and tells him it's a present "from my father." Then he drags the Invisibility Cloak back over him, so no one will be able to find where he's hidden.

CHAPTER EIGHT: SNAPE VICTORIOUS

Feeling blood run down his face, Harry lies on the floor and wonders if and when someone will find him. As time goes by and the train begins to lurch into movement, he feels more and more hopeless; but suddenly the Cloak flies off him and he sees Tonks's friendly face above him. Tonks fixes his nose before sending her Patronus, a furry four-legged animal, up to the school with a message. Stationed in Hogsmeade for the school's protection, she noticed that Harry didn't get off the train and came looking for him.

Slughorn's preferential treatment could cause Harry to develop a sense of arrogance and entitlement. Instead, he resists the professor's chummy attitude and disavows any distinction from his fellow students. Harry's imperviousness to these temptations is one of the most endearing aspects of his character.



Like Harry, Ginny's social status has increased due to her involvement in the infamous battle at the Ministry last year. However, she resists the temptation to use this new fame to attract attention, and helps protect Harry by refusing to divulge information about the fabled prophecy. In doing so, she shows that her values are fundamentally aligned with his.



Historically, Draco has drawn strength and arrogance from his family's standing in the Wizarding world; his exclusion from Slughorn's parties shows how he is suffering from his father's disgrace. Although Draco conspicuously lacks Harry and Ginny's sterling values, it's worth noting that his current position is lonely and difficult, especially for someone who cares so deeply about social status.



Even though Draco is actively harming Harry right now, his intense sense of loyalty to his father is a reminder that he and Harry are driven by some of the same impulses.



Harry has been following Draco on his own initiative – in fact, adults like Mr. Weasley have encouraged him to drop this line of investigation. However, he also sometimes relies on the adults in his life to protect him when things go wrong. In this sense, he's toggling between his dueling identities as a dependent child and independent adult.



As they walk up to the school, Harry looks curiously at Tonks. Last year, she'd been smiling and full of jokes most of the time, but now she's withdrawn, not even wanting to know how Harry broke his nose. He wonders if she really does blame herself for Sirius's death, which is surely not her fault.

When they reach Hogwarts, Harry tries to open the gates with magic, but Tonks flatly points out that the school has been enchanted to resist spells like these. Slowly, a lantern descends down to the gate; with loathing, Harry sees that it's none other than Professor Snape who's come to fetch him. He taunts Tonks that her new Patronus looks "weak," eliciting a look of shock and anger.

As Harry walks up the hill with Snape, it seems that his body is "generating waves of hatred." He feels that Snape's taunting of Sirius the previous year had caused his godfather to rush to the Ministry the night he died. Adding to his anger, Snape takes away fifty points from Gryffindor for Harry's lateness. Harry refuses to respond to Snape's smug tone. As he walks into the Great Hall, Harry is again embarrassed by people's stares. Scolding him for scaring everyone, Hermione charms the blood of his face.

From the head table, Harry sees Hagrid waving at him, next to a disapproving Professor McGonagall and an oblivious Professor Trelawney. It's hard to believe that this is the woman whose prophecy determined the entire course of Harry's life. As Ron and Hermione begin to question Harry about Slughorn's lunch, Dumbledore gets up to give his annual speech. Hermione gasps with shock to see the state of his hand.

After some logistical announcements, Dumbledore reveals that Professor Slughorn has been hired to teach Potions, while Professor Snape will take over Defense Against the Dark Arts. Shocked that his nemesis is getting the powerful role he's always wanted, Harry shouts aloud in surprise. Turning to the others, he "savagely" remarks that no Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher has lasted more than a year, and voices his hope that Snape will die on the job.

More gravely, Dumbledore reminds the students that with Voldemort's rise they are all in danger; all the students should take security measures seriously, no matter how inconvenient they might seem, and report any suspicious occurrences. With that, he cheerfully sends them off to bed.

Such interest in the interior thoughts of other people is unusual for Harry and shows the extent to which, whether or not he's aware of it, he's working to mature emotionally.



One of Snape's most odious personal characteristics is his ability to identify other people's weaknesses and shamelessly exploiting them. Whether or not he is loyal to Dumbledore, this is a malicious trait worthy of judgment in itself.



As the novel progresses, Harry will claim to distrust Snape due to various pieces of evidence he collects. However, it's also important to note how much of his animosity towards the professor is due to past grievances – namely, his feelings that Snape contributed to his parents' and Sirius's deaths.



Dumbledore's opening speech has always represented the strength and dignity of Hogwarts' traditions. The headmaster's physical injury creates a new sense of weakness that emphasizes the extent to which those traditions are now endangered.



Many times, Harry's keen sense of justice drives him to stand up for others and do good deeds. However, it also causes him to make extremely harsh judgments – like this pronouncement wishing for Snape's death, although it's not clear whether the professor has done anything to deserve such a fate.



Unlike the government, Dumbledore is able to balance grave warnings with a reassuring attitude, encouraging people to watch out for their safety without fostering unnecessary fear.



As they walk out of the Great Hall, Harry tells Ron what he overheard Malfoy say. However, Ron insists that Draco was just showing off for his friends – he refuses to believe that Malfoy is actually a Death Eater. The two are joined by Hagrid, who says how excited he is to see them tomorrow in his Care of Magical Creatures class. When he leaves, Harry and Ron look at each other with a sinking feeling – neither they nor Hermione are taking the class, and they know the friendly giant will feel slighted.

CHAPTER NINE: THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE

In the morning, Harry repeats his story to Hermione, but she too seems to agree with Ron. In any case, it's hard for them to talk because so many younger students are lurking around, trying to eavesdrop on them. As they leave Gryffindor, Hermione confiscates an illicit Frisbee from a fourth-year – only to have Ron take it for himself immediately. Passing by, Lavender Brown giggles at his audacity.

Over breakfast, the trio discuss how to break it to Hagrid that they're no longer taking his class. Next, Professor McGonagall gathers the Gryffindors to look over their O.W.L. results and assign the next year's classes. With her outstanding grades, Hermione quickly settles her schedule and jets off to Ancient Runes, but others are not so lucky. Neville is upset that he can't continue to Advanced Transfiguration, because his grandmother has pressed him to excel in the subject; but Professor McGonagall remarks crisply that she should learn "to be proud of the grandson she's got," especially after his bravery at the Ministry.

Next, McGonagall turns to Harry and informs him that while Snape only accepts advanced students with Outstanding O.W.L. results, his grade will qualify him to continue studying under Professor Slughorn – thus keeping open the option of becoming an Auror. Although Harry hasn't purchased any supplies, he signs up for the class. Ron and Harry set off together, pleased at their many free periods.

In an hour, they meet up with Hermione, who's already loaded down with homework. In Defense Against the Dark Arts, Snape has already turned his classroom into a dark lair. In his sinister voice, Snape describes the Dark Arts as "many, varied, ever-changing, and eternal;" Harry is disturbed by the "loving caress" in the professor's voice. Snape continues that, in fighting such forces, the young wizards must remain "flexible and inventive."

In the past, many of Draco's more dramatic pronouncements really were just calls for attention or respect from his friends. Again, Ron's insistence on viewing Draco in terms of his old childlike role, instead of acknowledging his capacity to act as an adult, causes him to underestimate Draco.



The constant attention from other students emphasizes the extent to which the trio are now considered Hogwarts celebrities. Even Ron, who often feels in Harry's shadow, is treated to additional attention from Lavender, which probably stems from his role in the Ministry battle last year.



In her comment to Neville, Professor McGonagall establishes herself as rigorously fair-minded and – unlike Neville's grandmother – impervious to material status symbols. In this sense, she's a foil to Professor Snape, who routinely plays favorites among the Slytherin students and behaves unprofessionally towards students against whom he holds grudges, like Harry and Hermione.



Professor McGonagall's announcement reawakens a dream that Harry had given up. However, as the novel progresses it will become increasingly clear to Harry that it's useless to fight Voldemort from within the Ministry.



Harry views Snape's words as malicious because of his preexisting bias against the professor; from another point of view, the professor can be seen as encouraging his students to take the Dark Arts seriously and never underestimate them. In many cases, Harry's conclusions are based on his fears rather than facts.



Snape asks who can name the advantages of non-verbal spell-casting. Although Hermione answers immediately and correctly, Snape sneers that her words are copied directly from the textbook. He divides the class into pairs and orders everyone to jinx each other without speaking. Hermione manages the feat in twenty minutes, but Snape ignores her work and maliciously watches Harry and Ron struggle to succeed.

Grabbing Ron's wand, Snape turns on Harry to "demonstrate;" reacting instinctively, Harry casts a Shield Charm that knocks Snape off his feet. Enraged, Snape gives him detention. Harry walks out of the class fuming about Snape's prejudice against him and his obvious love for the Dark Arts. However, Hermione points out, Snape is actually mirroring what Harry previously said about facing Voldemort: that fighting Dark magic is about "brains and guts" more than memorizing spells. Harry is shocked that Hermione has thought his words worth memorizing.

As they're talking, another Gryffindor runs up with a note from Dumbledore, summoning Harry to his office this Saturday. Harry is pleased, since the lesson is scheduled at the same time as his detention with Snape. For the rest of their break, the trio speculate on the kinds of spells Dumbledore will teach Harry.

In the afternoon, the friends scurry to the dungeon Potions classroom, where Slughorn greets Harry warmly. Nearby, a cauldron is emitting some of the best scents Harry has ever smelled, from broomstick handle to "something flowery he thought he might have smelled in the burrow." Finding that Harry and Ron don't have supplies, Slughorn presents them with a pile of old textbooks from his supply closet.

Turning to the class, Slughorn asks who can identify the various potions brewing at the front of the room. Hermione identifies them all, including the "flowery" mixture – which is a powerful love potion that smells different to each person. Ascertaining Hermione's name, Slughorn asks if she's related to a wizard he knows named Granger; when she responds that she's Muggle-born, he crows that Harry must have been referring to her when he talked about "the best witch in our year." Hermione turns to Harry with a delighted expression, but Ron is disgruntled, saying that there's nothing special in pointing out the obvious.

Snape always finds ways to discount Hermione's intelligence, which is one of the reasons Harry loathes him. However, his behavior is somewhat reminiscent of Harry and Ron's tendency to dismiss Hermione or undervalue the ways she helps them through all her bookish knowledge.



Harry's ability to fend off the professor is another indication of his exceptional skill at defensive magic. Meanwhile, Hermione is very astute when she points out that Snape's words echo Harry's own sentiments. Although Harry often considers her the trio's expert on "feelings," she's often the one who is able to make clear-eyed judgments based on facts, while Harry lets his emotions get in the way of decision-making.



Although Harry is generally immune to the temptations of celebrity, he's not always averse to using his special status to get out of punishment and unpleasant tasks.



For much of the novel, Harry will think of this "flowery" smell when grappling with his feelings for Ginny. This tactic speaks not only to his growing crush on his friend, but also his shame and guilt when it comes to articulating his emotions in a straightforward way.



Ron's annoyance is a sign that he's jealous of Hermione's affection – he wants her to be delighted with him, not Harry. At the same time, it's often Ron who dismisses Hermione's intelligence and good qualities, making her insecure and hungry for praise. While Ron's feelings for Hermione are certainly sympathetic, not until he makes an effort to understand her emotions will he be able to pursue them effectively.



Slughorn pretends to forget about the last potion brewing until a Hufflepuff asks him about it. Smugly, he reveals that it's Felix Felicis, which endows its drinker with luck. With great flair, he adds that he'll be giving a small bottle to whoever brews the best Draught of Living Death by the end of the class. Motivated by this prize, everyone scurries off to work.

Harry is annoyed to find that his loaned book is so crammed with annotations that the text is hardly visible. Squinting over the text, he sees that the previous owner has changed some of the instructions; Harry follows them and his potion immediately turns the correct color. Meanwhile, as Slughorn nears his table, Draco tries to get his attention by name-dropping his well-connected grandfather. Harry smirks to see the professor pass on without interest, muttering that he was sorry to hear of his recent death.

Seeing that the book's previous owner had valuable knowledge to share, he takes note of the additional marginalia. Hermione is frustrated to see that Harry's potion is rapidly exceeding her own, while he is shocked to find himself succeeding in this subject for once.

When Slughorn calls time and surveys the potions, he instantly declares Harry's the winner, saying it's clear that he inherited his mother Lily's talent for Potions. Harry pockets the tiny bottle of Felix Felicis. As he tells his friends about the secret notes in the book, Hermione shakes her head in disapproval.

Catching up with him, Ginny admonishes Harry for "taking orders" from anything written in a book – she's referring to her own disastrous experience with Voldemort's diary years ago. Emboldened, Hermione grabs the book from Harry's hands and casts a number of spells to reveal any enchantments, but without success. Annoyed, Harry grabs it back and stalks away. As he walks, he sees that someone has scrawled along the back cover, "This book is the property of the Half-Blood Prince."

CHAPTER TEN: THE HOUSE OF GAUNT

To Hermione's increasing frustration, Harry continues to follow the Half-Blood Prince's instructions and becomes even more beloved by Professor Slughorn. He's becoming more curious about the book's previous owner, who seems to be a remarkably gifted potioneer and has also written notes about spells he seems to have created himself.

Slughorn's flamboyant and friendly style of teaching sets him apart from Snape. At the same time, the two men share a sense of moral ambiguity that makes it difficult for Harry to decide if they are "good" or "bad."



While Draco's wealth and family background has usually given him a higher social standing, one of the changes in the new era of open combat against Voldemort is that Harry is deemed more important and special than Draco is. While Harry doesn't usually take advantage of this privilege, he's pretty merciless in watching Draco's fall from grace.



While Hermione usually relies on books and established knowledge in order to succeed, Harry is more likely to take chances that lead either to spectacular success or failure.



It's important that Hermione cares much less about success than morals. It's her influence that often forces Harry to think about the ethical implications of his actions.



Harry doesn't behave arrogantly or see himself as better than others, but in some sense his background does give him a sense of invincibility – he believes that no harm can come to him from this book, even though he's seen similar objects inflict great damage on his friends.



Harry's willingness to accept hints and clues from an anonymous author reflects his desire to receive external guidance in a world that appears increasingly dangerous and volatile.



On Saturday night, Harry arrives promptly at Dumbledore's office and gives the password to his gargoyles sentry; he finds the professor seated and in his cluttered office. The professor announces that it's time for Harry to learn more about Voldemort's motivations and intentions. Dumbledore has told Harry almost everything he knows, and from this point they will venture "together through the murky marshes of memory." A little skeptically, Harry asks if this knowledge will help him survive, and Dumbledore responds cheerfully that he hopes it will.

Dumbledore turns to his Pensieve – a device that allows people to view others' memories. Pulling a small bottle from his pocket, the professor explains that they are going to see the recollections of Bob Ogden, a former Ministry employee. They both plunge into the Pensieve, emerging in a country road behind Ogden, who is very poorly disguised as a Muggle. With Dumbledore and Harry in pursuit, Ogden trots off down the lane towards the town of Little Hangleton.

Harry can see the entire village in the valley below, with an impressive manor house standing on the other side. However, Ogden turns into a tiny and crooked path which eventually opens up into a dark copse sheltering a dilapidated cottage. As Ogden proceeds cautiously, a filthy man in rags drops from a tree, brandishing a knife and telling him to go away. Seeming nonplussed, Ogden protests that he can't understand what the man is saying; Harry realizes that the man has been speaking in Parseltongue.

Suddenly, the filthy man jinxes Ogden, throwing him to the ground. Another man, this one much older, hurries out of the cottage and laughs nastily, telling Ogden that "this is private property" and his son is entitled to "defend himself." The older man, whom Ogden addresses as Mr. Gaunt, sends his son inside. When Ogden protests, saying that it's Morfin he's come to see, the father changes the subject and asks aggressively if he's a pure-blood.

Ogden insists on entering the house, saying he's here to investigate a "serious breach of Wizarding law." Reluctantly, Mr. Gaunt allows Ogden to enter the grim and dirty cottage, where Morfin sits on a couch playing with a live snake. At the stove, a "defeated-looking" teenage girl stirs a pot; Mr. Gaunt briefly introduces her as Merope.

While Harry and Ron tend to focus on action above all else and view their feelings as irrelevant, Dumbledore is intent on plumbing Voldemort's psyche. In this sense he's much like Hermione, who is deeply attuned to the feelings of others and uses them to gain valuable insight. In this sense, Dumbledore is teaching Harry not just how to defeat Voldemort but how to adjust his values.



Diving into the memories of others forces Harry to literally experience events from another perspective. As his behavior towards characters like Draco shows, this is not a skill that comes naturally to him. His sessions with Dumbledore will give him new insight into Voldemort's history while also helping him to develop his character.



Even though Harry is as disgusted and confused as Ogden, he's also intimately connected to the filthy man by virtue of the sinister language they can both speak. Moments like this remind Harry that, even though he's locked in battle against Voldemort and his allies, they share many essential qualities.



Mr. Gaunt's preoccupation with Ogden's ancestry reveals that he shares Voldemort's racial biases. However, given that this episode predates the rise of Voldemort, his words are a reminder that the Dark Lord's evil principles are nothing novel, but rather stem from the prejudices that are common and sometimes accepted in the mainstream Wizarding world.



In the present day, Harry usually distrusts the Ministry of Magic; however, Ogden represents a stalwart governmental effort to address social ills. This part of the novel gives some nuance to Rowling's criticism of government ineptitude.



In a stern voice, Ogden accuses Morfin of performing magic in front of a Muggle last night. Merope suddenly drops a pot and Mr. Gaunt excoriates her, calling her a “useless sack of muck,” laughing further when she tries and fails to repair the pot with magic. Politely, Ogden raises his own wand to assist her.

Turning to the Ministry wizard, Mr. Gaunt dismisses the charges, saying that Morfin “taught a filthy Muggle a lesson.” Undeterred, Ogden produces a scroll summoning Morfin to the Ministry for a hearing. Mr. Gaunt completely loses his temper, calling Ogden a Mudblood and asking how he dares to give orders to a family as ancient as theirs. He brandishes an ugly black ring, which represents his family lineage, and drags Merope over to show off her necklace, which once belonged to Salazar Slytherin. As Slytherin’s last descendants, they’re worth more than anyone in Ogden’s family.

As Ogden, stone-faced, reads out the date of Morfin’s hearing, a loud carriage filled with laughing people passes by. Merope looks out the window in keen interest. Everyone inside can hear a young woman complaining about the hovel and asking her companion why he doesn’t remove it. The young man, Tom Riddle Sr., responds that this is the only land in the village that doesn’t belong to his family. Morfin starts to get up, but Mr. Gaunt warns him in Parseltongue to stay still.

Morfin taunts his sister in Parseltongue, saying that the Muggle clearly has a girlfriend, and would never like her. Mr. Gaunt asks Morfin what he’s talking about, and the son says viciously that Merope is always “hanging out the window” waiting for Tom Riddle Sr. to pass by. Furious that his daughter is “hankering after a filthy, dirt-veined Muggle,” Mr. Gaunt calls Merope a blood-traitor. Morfin puts in that this is the Muggle he jinxed with hives. Meanwhile, Ogden watches the incomprehensible argument with increasing trepidation.

Now completely unhinged, Mr. Gaunt throttles Merope, eliciting a yell from Harry. Ogden jinxes Gaunt, causing him to fall back; but when Morfin leaps up, Ogden has to run away from the cottage. On his way down the lane, he crashes into the carriage and its handsome driver Tom Riddle Sr., who laughs heartily at Ogden’s panic. Dumbledore tugs on Harry’s arm, pulling him out of the memory.

The starkest indicator of Mr. Gaunt’s deplorable character comes not through his rudeness to Ogden but his abuse of his own daughter.



Mr. Gaunt’s outburst displays that he sees family not as a group of people who love and support each other but as a mark of social standing, which entitles certain people to privilege and impunity from crime. The fact that Mr. Gaunt considers himself a member of a venerable family even while his home is dismal and his child is vicious testifies to the fundamental inaccuracy of his views.



Tom views the Gaunts as social undesirables because of their squalid home and eccentric ways. Meanwhile, Morfin and Mr. Gaunt disdain him for being a Muggle. Neither party is interested in the humanity of the other or considers their worth from any perspective except the social mores of their respective cultures.



In a sense, Morfin’s misuse of magic and the entire dispute stem from his desire to control Merope’s love life: after discerning that she’s interested in someone considered inappropriate, he’s punished both her and the object of her desire. These family actions are defined not by love but by a sense of male entitlement to control female sexuality.



Tom Riddle’s behavior testifies to his solipsism and arrogance. In a sense, he’s the Muggle counterpart to the social obsessions displayed by Mr. Gaunt.



Immediately, Harry asks if Merope survived. Dumbledore responds that Ogden soon returns with reinforcements; both Morfin and his father, Marvolo, do stints in Azkaban for their history of Muggle attacks. Recognizing the name, Harry realizes that the old man is actually Voldemort's grandfather, and Merope his mother. Dumbledore explains that, although they were once a prestigious Wizarding family, the Gaunts gained a reputation for violence and insanity – especially due to their habit of marrying their cousins. The family money was gone long before Marvolo was born, but their arrogance and entitlement remained.

Moreover, Dumbledore reveals that the Muggle attacked by Morfin is Tom Riddle Sr., Merope's secret love and Voldemort's father. Harry can't believe that two such mismatched people got married, but Dumbledore hypothesizes that, without her father and brother to terrorize her, Merope tapped into her latent ingenuity and somehow slipped Tom a love potion. The fact is, within a few months of this encounter Tom and Merope had run off together, causing a village scandal.

When Marvolo returns from Azkaban, he expects his daughter to be waiting with dinner; perhaps because of the shock of her desertion, he dies soon after his release. While it's hard to tell exactly what happened between Tom Riddle Sr. and Merope, Dumbledore explains that some months after his elopement, Tom returned to the village claiming to have been "hoodwinked" by a fraud. It's likely that, believing he had come to truly love her and the baby she was carrying, Merope chose to lift the enchantment on her husband. However, this was clearly a misstep, as he abandoned her and never took an interest in his son.

With that, Dumbledore concludes the lesson and Harry stands up. Before leaving, he asks Dumbledore again if it's important to know about Voldemort's past, and the professor responds that it is imperative. Harry asks for and receives permission to tell Ron and Hermione what Dumbledore is teaching him.

As he turns to go, Harry notices that Dumbledore's new black ring looks very similar to Marvolo Gaunt's. When he points it out, Dumbledore admits that it's the very same one and that he "acquired it very recently." Astutely, Harry asks if he got the ring at the same time that he injured his hand. With a smile, Dumbledore tells him that it's a story for another time.

Harry's immediate concern for Merope's safety displays a sense of compassion and an ability to consider people's actions in their specific contexts: even though Merope is the mother of a villain, she's also a victim within her own family and thus deserving of sympathy. Harry is much more capable of suspending his judgment while watching the memories than when he's confronted by morally compromised characters in real life.



Even though Harry sees the Gaunts and the Riddles as essentially different, they're actually not that different – both families share a preoccupation with social standing that ultimately dooms their offspring.



It's increasingly clear that Voldemort inherits his lack of compassion from his father. In a way, by using the love potion, Merope tries to do what Harry has done organically over the past few years: extricate herself from a family with pernicious values and build relationships that are based on emotional support and love. It's her tragic failure to achieve this that leads to Voldemort's cold upbringing and his development into a sociopath.



Even though Harry is being definitively singled out for special treatment by Dumbledore, he still wants to share this privilege with his friends. This shows that he considers the fight against Voldemort a fundamentally collaborative process.



Dumbledore is being more frank than ever in these new lessons, but he still keeps some things secret from Harry. Even as he trains the teenager to take a more active role in fighting Voldemort, he also acts as a protector and caregiver.



CHAPTER ELEVEN: HERMIONE'S HELPING HAND

Harry finds that his workload as a sixth-year is much more strenuous than expected. Even Hermione struggles with the nonverbal magic that is expected in almost every class. Harry's best subject is Potions, but only because of his textbook's assistance. Meanwhile, the trio has neglected to visit Hagrid, and he's giving them the cold shoulder for dropping his class. Hermione is upset about this rift, but Harry assures her they'll visit him after he holds Quidditch trials this morning.

Harry is puzzled that so many people are trying out this year, but Hermione impatiently informs him that it's because, after all he endured last year before being proved right about Voldemort, he's an intriguing and "fanciable" figure. Ron points out that he too has scars from the night at the Ministry, and that he's as tall as Harry.

That morning, Hedwig arrives carrying Harry's new copy of *Advanced Potion-Making*. Hermione is triumphant that Harry will finally have to return his dog-eared copy, but instead he uses magic to put the new cover on his old book.

In disgust, Hermione turns to the *Daily Prophet*. Ron asks her casually if anyone they know has died – a question he now poses every day. Hermione reports that there have been three more dementor attacks and, incredibly, the friendly Knight Bus driver Stan Shunpike has been arrested after being heard talking about Death Eaters' "secret plans" in a pub. Harry feels that Stan, a big talker, was mostly likely trying to impress people by pretending to know more than he did, and wonders why the Ministry is taking this seriously. Hermione posits that they're probably trying to seem on top of the situation, in order to quell rising terror.

Meanwhile, Hermione points out that Dumbledore has been absent from school much of the week, probably on Order business. The situation is seeming more and more dangerous – just yesterday Hannah Abbot was taken out of Herbology and told of her mother's murder. As they leave the Great Hall, the trio pass the Patil twins whispering anxiously, but Lavender Brown turns to give Ron a smile. Hermione looks displeased for the entire walk to the Quidditch pitch.

The trio's quarrel with Hagrid, one of their oldest friends, springs from the fact that their new responsibilities as sixth-years disrupts their old class schedule and lifestyle. In this sense, it reflects the fact that growing up involves shifting and restructuring one's friendships.



Even though Ron fought alongside Harry at the Ministry, he doesn't enjoy nearly as much celebrity status. As in previous years, one of Ron's greatest challenges is learning to value himself even though he spends most of his life in Harry's shadow.



Harry's reckless trust in the Half-Blood Prince's book shows that, to some extent, he considers himself immune from bad consequences – perhaps because of the many times he's successfully faced down danger.



Stan Shunpike's imprisonment reflects the Ministry's desire to project a strong and forceful image, even when doing so distracts from more important aspects in the fight against Voldemort. Moreover, imprisoning Stan increases paranoia by encouraging people to believe that harmless neighbors are actually Death Eaters, when this is not the case. This case is one of the largest factors in the erosion of Harry's trust in the Ministry.



The sudden death of Hannah's mother, along with other murders like that of Amelia Bones at the outset of the novel, show that it's not just Harry losing trusted authority figures – rather, this new sense of vulnerability and danger is widespread across Hogwarts students and the general Wizarding world.



It seems like half of Gryffindor is trying out for the team, including the swaggering Cormac McLaggen, who is going for Keeper, Ron's position. Harry quickly weeds out most of the entrants by posing some basic tests. Two hours and "several broken teeth" later, Harry has assembled most of his team, including Ginny, who's outflown all the other chasers.

Harry has left the Keeper tryouts for last, hoping that the stadium might empty out and thus pose less pressure for Ron. However, the crowd is even bigger and Ron looks sick. To Harry's annoyance, Cormac performs well, saving all his goals until he shoots in the wrong direction on the last try. As Ron mounts his broom, Lavender Brown cheers from the stands and Harry feels anxious; however, to his delight Ron saves every penalty. Barely keeping a straight face, he informs Cormac that Ron has won the position. Aggressively, Cormac orders Harry to give him another try, but when Harry stands his ground Cormac stalks off disgruntledly.

Harry turns to greet the new team and Hermione runs onto the pitch to congratulate Ron. As they walk towards Hagrid's house, Ron recounts all his saves to Hermione's increasing amusement. However, when he remarks that Cormac looked like he'd been Confounded on his last shot, Hermione looks pink and embarrassed. When they arrive at the cabin Buckbeak, tethered outside, sinks into a gentle bow. Harry pets him, thinking that he must miss Sirius.

Returning from the forest, Hagrid gives the trio an angry glance and slams the door of his cabin. Harry bangs on the door and threatens to blow it open until Hagrid finally opens up. Clearly resentful, he pours them some tea and shrugs off their insinuations that they've missed him and couldn't fit his class into their schedules. However, a minute later the giant bursts into tears and confides that his old friend, the giant spider Aragog living in the school's forest, is sick and dying. Although they feel little sympathy for Aragog, who once tried to kill them, the trio comfort Hagrid and are soon reinstated in his good graces.

Since Harry has detention with Snape soon, the trio hurry up to the Great Hall for dinner. On the way in they see Cormac, who seems unusually clumsy and stumbles against the doorframe. Pulling Hermione aside, Harry quietly points out that it really does seem as though Cormac had been Confused this morning. Sheepishly, Hermione admits that she did it, but justifies herself by saying that Cormac is bad-tempered had been insulting Ron and Ginny. Amused, Harry teases Hermione for behaving less properly than, as a prefect, she should.

Ginny has never been on the Quidditch team before. This new development will place her in close proximity to Harry and force him to grapple more definitively with his feelings for her.



Harry clearly believes that character is just as important as raw talent in a Quidditch player: even though Cormac is at least as good as Ron, Harry doesn't want anyone this arrogant or rude on the team. At the same time, his obvious happiness that Ron has scraped through does show his willingness to prioritize his friends once he's in a position of power.



Harry's thoughts at this moment reflect his own grief for Sirius. It's a reminder that, even as he's stepping into new leadership roles as the Quidditch captain, in many ways he's still a child craving guidance from a parental figure.



Even though Harry and especially Hermione have been very worried about Hagrid's hurt feelings, this crisis is soon resolved satisfactorily – suggesting that established friendships can persevere despite the pressures of growing up. However, subsequent conflicts among friends – like Ron and Hermione's imminent quarrel – will take months to resolve, showing that not all issues are so easily handled.



Usually, it's Hermione who insists on following rules to the letter (as she does with Harry's potions textbook). Seeing her violate them so blatantly indicates the strength of her feelings for Ron. At the same time, she's tactful and restrained in expressing these feelings – unlike Ron, who will cause several fights while trying to come to grips with his feelings.



As soon as he walks into the Great Hall, Harry is waylaid by Professor Slughorn, who genially invites him and Hermione to a special supper in his rooms with a few other “rising stars.” He seems not to notice that Ron is standing next to him. For once, Harry is happy to announce that he has detention with Professor Snape, but Slughorn jets out to “persuade” Severus to rearrange it. Hermione hopes anxiously that she doesn’t have to go alone, while Ron is clearly annoyed at being snubbed.

After dinner, Hermione reaches for the evening edition of the *Daily Prophet*. She’s surprised to read that Mr. Weasley’s office has just searched the Malfoy house on the basis of a “confidential tip-off.” Harry reveals that the “tip” came from him, and insists that if nothing was found in the house, Draco must have smuggled it into the school; but Hermione points out that everyone who arrived at the school on time was searched before entrance.

Grumpily, Ron tells Harry to drop his obsession with Draco; when Hermione snaps at him that it’s not their fault Slughorn doesn’t like him, he storms off to bed. Just then Demelza Robbins, one of the new Quidditch players arrives with a curt message from Snape telling Harry that he must attend detentions “no matter how many party invitations [he’s] received.”

CHAPTER TWELVE: SILVER AND OPALS

For several weeks, Dumbledore seems to be absent from the castle, and Harry wonders whether he has forgotten about their lessons. Meanwhile, the school’s first Hogsmeade outing is scheduled on Saturday. On that morning, Harry lies in bed studying the marginalia in *Advanced Potion-Making*. The notes include many handy jinxes, one of which Harry has used to glue Filch’s tongue to his mouth. He’s also used the Prince’s Muffliato spell to fill the ears of those around him with buzzing in order to have conversations unheard. However, Hermione becomes disapproving and refuses to speak each time he tries a new spell.

Now, Harry spots a new incantation, Levicorpus. Flicking his wand in the air, he thinks the spell in his head and is shocked to see that he’s inadvertently caused Ron’s body to skyrocket into the air and hang from his ankle. Consulting the book anxiously, Harry finds the counter-spell and releases him. Fortunately, Ron is amused by the whole episode, but when he tells Hermione, she scolds Harry for trying out a strange spell with no idea what could happen. Besides, she says, she doesn’t think well of anyone who devotes his time to thinking up dodgy jinxes like this.

While Slughorn considers himself a sophisticated man, his invitation and snub violate basic norms of politeness. In moments like this, Slughorn’s obsession with cultivating the friendship of “promising” students emerges not just as a quirk but a pattern of behavior that actively harms others.



As Hermione’s clear-headed analysis of Harry’s theory shows, he’s acting based on his feelings, rather than on actual evidence that he observes. Although Harry’s suspicions about Draco will prove somewhat correct, it’s important that they stem from his pre-existing bias rather than facts.



Many of Ron and Hermione’s quarrels center around Slughorn’s parties. Ron’s frustration stems from the fear that if people like Slughorn don’t value him, Hermione might not either. Hermione is angry that Ron seems to blame her for her scholastic achievements, rather than celebrating them.



Looking through the Half-Blood Prince’s notes, Harry most enjoys the spells that allow him to live outside the rules – punishing adults at Hogwarts, for example, or hampering the senses of others. While Harry always resists preferential treatment when offered by others, his use of spells like this shows that he does consider himself somewhat entitled to privileges that others don’t have.



Although Ron and Harry dismiss Hermione’s qualms now, later events will prove that she is right to question the Prince’s morals – and Harry will eventually admit he was wrong to have trusted the book so much. Her input, however unwelcome at first, shows that true heroes can’t function alone; they have to accept guidance and help from trusted friends.



Suddenly, Harry remembers seeing his father perform this very spell when he briefly dived into Snape's memories last year. He wonders aloud if his father was the Half-Blood Prince, but Hermione points out that lots of people use similar spells – even, for example, the Death Eaters at the Quidditch World Cup two years ago. Ron accuses her of being biased against the Prince because he's better at Potions than she is.

Ginny arrives with a letter for Harry, summoning him to Dumbledore's next lesson. He invites her to join them in Hogsmeade, but she's going with her boyfriend, Dean. After being brusquely searched by Filch, the trio endures a bitterly cold walk to the village and staggers into the sweet shop – only to run into Professor Slughorn, who ribs Harry for having missed so many of his "little suppers." In fact, Harry has been scheduling Quidditch practice every time he receives an invitation. To Hermione's chagrin, his lesson with Dumbledore coincides with the next scheduled soiree.

Finished at the sweet shop, the trio heads towards the Three Broomsticks, but on the way, Harry spots Mundungus Fletcher, one of the Order's seedier members, selling antiques out of an old suitcase. Quickly, Harry realizes that Mundungus is actually peddling stolen goods from Sirius's house. Enraged, Harry pins the thief to the pub's wall and interrogates him, but Mundungus squirms away and Disapparates. As Harry shouts at the air, Hermione drags him inside, exhorting him not to talk so loudly about the Order's secret headquarters.

While Ron cranes his neck to catch sight of Madame Rosmerta, the pretty bartender, and Hermione jibes him, Harry drinks his butterbeer and reminisces about Sirius, who always hated his family's pretentious possessions. Gloomily, they decide to cut the trip short. As they begin the cold walk, Harry wonders what Ginny and Dean are up to.

Ahead of them, Harry sees Katie Bell, one of his Quidditch players, arguing with her friend Leanne. They appear to be grappling over a package Katie is holding. As Katie tugs it out of reach, she suddenly rises into the air, her face eerily empty. Then she starts to scream, clearly in "terrible anguish." Harry, Ron, and Leanne grab her and pull her to the ground, where she continues to scream. Running for help, Harry soon collides with Hagrid and tells him that someone's been cursed. The giant scoops up the girl and runs off toward Hogwarts.

Even though there's little evidence for the theory, Harry is enamored of the idea that he might have found a new connection to his father. This wishful thinking reflects a desire to be guided and protected by trusted adults, rather than left to figure things out alone.



In previous novels, Ginny has always been available to hang out when Harry and Ron want to spend time with her; now, she's developing a dating life and mature personality. In part, her independence and confidence is what attracts Harry to her. However, these are also the traits that make Ron jealous, and inspire his chauvinistic behavior towards his sister.



Mundungus's actions violate Harry's keen sense of right and wrong, and desecrate the memory of Sirius, whom Harry is still mourning; it's understandable that he's enraged. However, as it does in other moments, his moral anger makes him feel entitled to take things into his own hands, rather than reporting these events to someone empowered to punish Mundungus. It also makes him act unwisely, for example speaking publicly about the location of Order headquarters.



While Sirius wasn't a perfect role model, his behavior and background taught Harry not to put much store by a family's social standing or material possessions – after all, Sirius came from a wealthy and powerful clan, yet was punished for his values and eventually disowned.



Although Katie hasn't died, the sudden attack she's suffered is another catastrophe occurring in a public space normally considered secure. This event builds on the murders and disasters discussed at the beginning of the book to create a sense of public unease, one that permeates even the safest location in the Wizarding world – Hogwarts itself.



As Hermione comforts Leanne, Leanne explains that the curse happened when the package's wrapping tore. Ron leans down to touch the brown paper, under which an opal necklace is visible; but Hermione pulls his arm back, saying that she saw the necklace long ago in Borgin and Burkes. Leanne said that Katie wouldn't explain where she got the package, just repeating that she had to deliver it to someone at Hogwarts – she realizes now that her friend must have been under the Imperius Curse.

Harry wraps up the necklace in his scarf and takes it with him. He points out to the others that, since the necklace was at Borgin and Burkes, Draco knew about it and could easily have bought it. Ron and Hermione are skeptical, and before they have time to argue, Professor McGonagall hurries up, takes the necklace, and orders them all to her office, where Leanne recounts the day's events.

Harry asks to see Dumbledore, but as the professor is away, he's forced to confide his suspicions about Draco to McGonagall, who asks him what proof he has. When he admits that he didn't see Draco enter or leave Borgin and Burke's with any suspicious packages, McGonagall sternly warns against "pointing the finger of blame" without evidence. Besides, she said, Malfoy was doing detention with her during the Hogsmeade excursion.

Although he's annoyed at Ron and Hermione for refusing to back him up, Harry eagerly joins in as they discuss whom the necklace was meant for. Harry suggests that someone was targeting Slughorn, who has refused to join the Death Eaters, but Hermione worries that it was meant for Harry. Ron and Hermione conclude that the whole plan wasn't very well thought-out – after all, the necklace didn't even make it inside the castle. But when Harry points out that such thinking is characteristic of Draco, the others ignore him.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: THE SECRET RIDDLE

By the time Harry arrives at Dumbledore's office the next night, the school is abuzz with rumors about Katie Bell. Harry passes the gargoyle to find the professor sitting before his Pensieve and looking "unusually tired." He says that while Katie is now recovering, she's had a lucky escape – had she touched the necklace with an ungloved hand, she would have died instantly. It was only Professor Snape who was able to stop the curse from spreading.

The possibility of being placed under the Imperius Curse and being used for evil is mentioned in the leaflet of Ministry guidelines Harry received at the beginning of the novel. Yet, as Leanne's confusion shows, the leaflet gives little guidance on how to properly confront such a situation. The Ministry's approach to this public crisis stokes fear without providing any methods to resolve it.



Harry's point here is credible – after all, they witnessed Draco look at the necklace on display. Ron and Hermione's refusal to believe evil of Draco stems partly from fair-mindedness but also from an unwillingness to believe that the fight against the Death Eaters has escalated enough to involve people they know.



McGonagall's refusal to entertain these theories, even though she dislikes Draco personally, sets her apart from Snape (who takes any chance to punish students outside his house) and teaches Harry an important lesson about not letting his personal biases inform the moral judgments he makes.



The fact that Harry could be a target of the Death Eaters within Hogwarts itself escalates his existing sense of unease and danger. Dumbledore is preparing Harry to actively combat Voldemort in the future, but it seems like this fight is coming to him before he's ready to face it.



As he will throughout the novel, Dumbledore emphasizes Snape's role in stymieing Death Eater plots in order to affirm his trust in the professor. However, Harry refuses to accept Snape's actions as proof of his loyalty – showing that his personal biases are overriding the evidence before him.



Harry repeats his suspicions about Draco to Dumbledore, but the professor merely says that he will perform a thorough investigation into the incident. He turns the subject to Merope Gaunt, saying that after her husband's abandonment she was left alone in London with her infant son. He knows this because Caractacus Burke, one of the founders of the infamous antiques store, told him that Merope sold him her locket from Slytherin, naively accepting a tiny price.

Harry is indignant that Merope didn't get more for the necklace, and wonders why she didn't use magic to help herself. Dumbledore suggests that her despair at Tom's abandonment sapped her powers, to the point where she couldn't stay alive even to save her son. Seeing Harry's distress, he asks if he's actually feeling sorry for Lord Voldemort. Harry points out that Merope had a choice to die, unlike his mother, but Dumbledore warns him against judging her "harshly" – Merope was never as courageous as Lily.

Now, Dumbledore draws Harry into one of his own memories, in which he visits a grimy London orphanage to invite one of its charges, Tom Riddle, to attend Hogwarts. Although she's initially distrustful, the overlooked matron Mrs. Cole opens up about Tom's history. Merope gave birth in the orphanage and died an hour later; Tom has been strange for his whole life, frightening the other children and seeming to be responsible for many "nasty incidents," although it's impossible to catch him misbehaving. She won't be sorry to see him go.

Mrs. Cole takes Dumbledore to Tom's room, where he sits in front of the pale, arrogant boy and explains gently that he's come to take him to a special school. Tom is immediately convinced that he's being sent to an asylum, and protests that he never did anything to anyone. However, when Dumbledore says that Hogwarts is a school for magic, he seems to gain Tom's respect; the boy boasts about being able to move things with his mind and "make bad things happen to people who annoy me."

Tom demands that Dumbledore "prove" he's a wizard, so the professor points his wand at the wardrobe, inside which something starts rattling. Reluctantly, Tom takes down a small box which contains various toys stolen from other children. Dumbledore warns that such behavior is not allowed at Hogwarts, and demands that Tom return the possessions. The boy agrees, but seems neither embarrassed nor contrite.

The story of Merope's life – and Voldemort's origins – emphasizes the extent to which lack of family support can disadvantage an individual. Through moments like these, Harry learns to see his behavior as stemming not just from his good character but also from the safety and support offered him by his friends, the Weasleys, and even his dead parents.



Even though Voldemort is his sworn enemy, Harry is still able to identify with the despair his mother faced and the lonely childhood he suffered as a result. This indicates that, although his conception of good and evil is very rigid now, he will eventually take a more compassionate approach to morally ambiguous people.



On one hand, this passage suggests that Voldemort's nefarious character has been ingrained since birth – he's always had the ability and the desire to harm others. At the same time, by emphasizing the fact that he grows up in a squalid atmosphere without any adults who genuinely love him, it demonstrates the effect that upbringing and lack of family can have on character development.



Unlike Harry, who at first has trouble believing that he's a wizard, Tom is already convinced that he's special and different from his classmates, and unsurprised to have Dumbledore confirm this. Moments like this show that, while Harry and Voldemort share some traits and experience similar upbringings, their instincts cause them to respond and develop in fundamentally different ways.



The young Tom Riddle sees his magical gifts as a license to harm others and exercise power over them. Instead, Dumbledore tries to communicate that possessing power requires thoughtfulness and responsibility – just as, through these lessons, he does to Harry.



Dumbledore explains that since Tom has no money, Hogwarts will provide his robes and supplies. Tom quickly rejects the professor's offer to help him shop, instead asking for directions to Diagon Alley. When Dumbledore mentions that the Leaky Cauldron's barkeeper shares his name, the boy wrinkles his nose – he doesn't like the fact that there are so many Toms. Quietly, Tom says to himself that his father must have been a wizard; if his mother had magic, she wouldn't have died.

As Tom bids the professor farewell, Harry and Dumbledore step out of the memory, discussing Tom's extreme readiness to believe in his own uniqueness. At the time Dumbledore had no idea what he would grow up to become, but he was disturbed by "his obvious instincts for cruelty, secrecy, and domination."

Dumbledore also points out Tom's disdain for his own name, which shows his core desire to be "different, separate, notorious." Like his adult incarnation, the young Riddle prefers working alone to accepting help from anyone. These days, even the most prominent Death Eaters aren't really Voldemort's friends or confidantes.

Lastly, Dumbledore remarks that even as a child Voldemort was addicted to "trophies" from his exploits. He says this characteristic will prove important later. Before leaving, Harry asks why Dumbledore is no longer wearing Marvolo's ring, but the professor just waves him away.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: FELIX FELICIS

During Herbology the next day, Harry updates Ron and Hermione on his lesson – although everyone is intrigued by Voldemort's youth, only Hermione is convinced that the information will be truly useful. Harry asks Hermione how Slughorn's supper was, and she responds that he introduced them to a famous Quidditch player, who was "a bit full of herself."

Harry eagerly accepted Hagrid's help after learning about his origins, earning himself a lifelong friend and protector. On the contrary, from his first days as a wizard Tom Riddle's behavior leads him to become fundamentally isolated and friendless.



Even though Dumbledore always encourages Harry to believe in the possibility of personal redemption – for example, in characters like Snape and Slughorn – his depiction of Voldemort as inherently and irredeemably evil suggests that he doesn't think this possibility exists for everyone.



Riddle's desire to think of himself as fundamentally distinct from others is another way in which he's different from Harry, who consistently resists being set apart or treated preferentially.



Dumbledore's careful analysis of this scene demonstrates his belief that youthful actions heavily inform adult character.



Hermione's belief in the utility of Dumbledore's lessons reflects the fact that she is much more emotionally mature than Harry and Ron and more likely to pay attention to people's feelings and backgrounds, while they are inclined to dismiss these things as irrelevant.



Professor Sprout scolds the trio to focus on their plants, and with difficulty they begin to wrangle their Snargaluff stumps. As they work, Hermione announces that Slughorn is hosting a Christmas party and has explicitly charged her with checking Harry's free evenings. Grumpy as always when this topic comes up, Ron sarcastically says that Hermione should hook up with Cormac – then they can become “King and Queen Slug.” Hermione retorts that she was going to invite Ron as her date, but now she doesn't want to. Ron is startled and a little contrite; Harry bends over his work in order to extricate himself from this conversation.

Harry isn't exactly surprised to see these issues come up, but he doesn't know how he feels. He doesn't want the friend group to be fractured if they date and break up, but he also doesn't want to be shut out by their relationship, either. Over the next few days, Harry watches Ron and Hermione closely, but all he notices is that they're more polite than usual.

Meanwhile, now that Katie is out of commission, Harry has to find a new Chaser for the Quidditch team. Conquering the “sinking feeling” in his stomach, he offers the position to Dean. A good flier, Dean fits into the team well – but Ron, whose playing is inconsistent due to his nerves, is performing increasingly poorly and causing discord among the entire team.

Harry is walking back to Gryffindor Tower with Ron, trying to encourage him, when they stumble upon Ginny and Dean making out in a hidden corridor. Harry feels as if “something large and scaly [had] erupted into life” in his stomach, especially when Dean gives him a “shifty grin.” Meanwhile, Ron rudely breaks them apart and scolds his sister for making out “in public.”

When Dean leaves, Ginny turns on Ron, telling him that what she does is none of his business and accusing him of being jealous because he's never kissed anyone. Ron implies that she's behaving in a sexually loose way and Ginny, losing her temper, tries to jinx him. As he dodges her repeated attempts, she jeers that all his friends have had some romance in their lives – even Hermione once “snogged” Viktor Krum.

Hermione brings up Slughorn's Christmas party in order to invite Ron, and perhaps begin a new phase of their relationship. His immediate assumption that she means to exclude him reflects the extent to which he undervalues himself, or feels himself unlikely to attract Hermione's attention. While these feelings are understandable and sympathetic, they also cause him to behave in a very hurtful manner.



It's interesting that Harry conceives of romance not in terms of the benefits it might provide but the threat it poses to existing friendships. This reflects the guilt he's feeling over his latent feelings for Ginny.



Just as he does in his behavior towards Hermione, when Ron feels he's lacking or unworthy in some way he lashes out at others. Although his emotional responses are highly predictable, he's unable to analyze or control them, showing how childish he still is when it comes to his feelings.



Harry is understandably upset to see his crush kissing someone else; but by describing his feelings as a sort of monster, he suggests that they're somehow shameful or embarrassing. Harry's fumbling approach to romance is largely caused by the fact that he constantly feels guilty about very normal feelings.



No matter what Ginny is doing with her boyfriend, Ron has no right to decide whether it's appropriate, much less prevent her from doing it. It's admirable that Ginny is able to articulate this, rather than caving in to her brother's bullying. Unlike Harry and Ron, she refuses to be shamed for her developing sexuality.



After Ginny storms off, Harry calms Ron down and walks him back to the common room. He tries to tell himself that he's only upset because Ginny is Ron's sister, but all of the sudden he pictures himself kissing her. This fantasy is punctured by the image of Ron barging in and accusing Harry of betraying his trust. Barely speaking, the boys get ready for bed; for a long time Harry lies awake, telling himself that it's natural to feel protective of Ginny, having spent so much time around her.

The next day, Ron behaves with "icy, sneering indifference" towards Hermione, who is completely perplexed by his attitude. His aggression makes his Quidditch play even more inconsistent and worsens morale among the team – so much that Harry threatens to kick him off the team. At this, Ron deflates immediately and says that he's going to resign after the next day's game. No encouragement Harry gives him can change his mind.

Harry desperately wants to beat Slytherin and prove himself as a captain, and that night he lies awake planning how he can give Ron the confidence to play well. The next morning, Harry escorts a sickly Ron to breakfast and hands him a glass of pumpkin juice – but Hermione sharply warns him not to drink it, having noticed that Harry slipped something into it. Not bothering to lie very well, Harry feigns innocence. Ron tells Hermione to "stop bossing me around" and downs the juice.

When they get to the locker room, Ginny announces that Draco isn't playing today, having become ill. Harry wonders if he's faking and feels distracted. As the game begins, commentator Zacharias Smith derides Ron's abilities as a Keeper but is proven wrong as he quickly saves several goals. For the entire match, Ron and Ginny play spectacularly well. Although the Slytherin Seeker spots the Snitch before Harry, Harry manages to distract him and catch it, winning the game. In retaliation for Smith's comments, Ginny crashes into the commentator's box.

In the locker room, Hermione confronts Ron and Harry, accusing them of using the Felix Felicis potion to win the game. Grinning, Harry pulls the full bottle out of his pocket – he only pretended to spike Ron's drink. Having really believed he drank the potion, Ron is astounded to find that he played so well by himself – but he turns on Hermione and excoriates her for lacking confidence in him. When he leaves the locker room, she's almost in tears. Having felt sure that a successful match would restore their friendship, Harry feels dejected – he doesn't know how to explain to Hermione that Ron is actually mad about her relationship with Viktor Krum.

Troublingly, Harry's fantasy suggests that he supports Ron's feelings of entitlement to control Ginny's sexuality. Moreover, the sense of doom that he associates with pursuing his feelings for Ginny shows that he considers romance inherently threatening, rather than (as she does) something to explore and enjoy.



Ron views Hermione's fling with Viktor Krum, two years before, as a personal offense against him – even though he's never even confessed his feelings towards her. Ron's behavior shows that he considers the mere fact of being attached to a woman, romantically or not, as a license to control her love life.



While Harry hasn't actually given Ron the Felix Felicis potion, Ron finds it quite conceivable that he's willing to do so, and is willing to go along with it. Both Harry and Ron judge other people harshly but are often willing to bend the rules in their favor, while Hermione – who usually views other people's actions with compassion – is the most morally rigorous when it comes to her own behavior.



Even though the team has felt fractured lately and Ron and Ginny have been fighting, they're able to win the game by supporting each other – Ginny's revenge against Smith shows that she'll stick up for her brother even when she's mad at him. Unlike Voldemort, Harry always sees himself as part of a team and fosters a culture of loyalty whenever he's in a position of power.



Before Harry's revelation, Ron and Hermione both think that Ron would not have been able to play so well without external help. However, Ron acts as though Hermione has personally insulted him. He's so unable to acknowledge or overcome his own feelings of inferiority that he takes them out on Hermione – who, ironically, is the person who most values him and appreciates his good qualities.



Harry arrives at Gryffindor Tower to find a party in full swing and Hermione nowhere in sight. Smugly, Ginny points out Ron, who is feverishly making out with Lavender Brown in a corner. Ginny hopes that one day he'll "refine his technique." Seeing Hermione dart out of the portrait hole, Harry dodges several eager girls and follows.

Harry finds Hermione in an empty classroom, glumly conjuring up yellow birds. Harry is wondering what to say when Ron and Lavender burst in, hand in hand. Giggling, Lavender leaves, but Hermione waves her wand and the yellow birds fly at Ron and attack him. In tears, she stalks out and slams the door.

Ron pursues Lavender in order to feel as mature as his friends and sister, who have all dated people before. However, this largely superficial relationship actually emphasizes his immaturity, and forms a contrast to his sincere friendship with Hermione.



Harry usually tries to ignore his more complicated feelings, as well as those of the people around them. The fact that he's actively trying to comfort Hermione now shows that he's growing in emotional maturity.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN: THE UNBREAKABLE VOW

Snow is falling and the castle is decorated for Christmas – complete with groups of girls swarming under the mistletoe when Harry goes past. He's increasingly annoyed by the constant presence of Lavender Brown, who sees "any moment that she was not kissing Ron as wasted" and dejected that his two best friends aren't speaking to each other. Whenever the subject comes up Ron becomes extremely defensive and repeats that since Hermione "snogged Krum" he can do whatever he wants.

Since Hermione will no longer sit in the common room, Harry can only speak with her in the library, where she insists that she has no interest in what Ron is doing. More importantly, she warns Harry that she's overheard lots of girls, especially Romilda Vane, plotting the best way to slip him a love potion and dupe him into taking them to Slughorn's Christmas party. Hermione advises choosing a date and putting an end to speculation.

Remembering that love potions from Fred and George's store have been banned at school, Harry realizes that people are still succeeding in bringing in illicit objects. Eagerly, he tells Hermione that Draco might have found a way to ship the necklace to school, but she dismisses the idea.

When they return to Gryffindor Tower, Romilda Vane immediately gives Harry a box of chocolates. Hermione throws him a smug look; but when she sees Ron and Lavender "entwined" in an armchair she stalks off to bed. Harry hopes that the two will cool off over the break, but after a disastrous Transfiguration lesson in which Hermione laughs at Ron's spellwork and he mocks the way she raises her hand so cruelly that she cries, he doubts this will happen.

Right now, it seems that Harry's fears have proved correct – new romantic developments have indeed imperiled his longstanding friendships. However, the novel will eventually draw a distinction between Ron's ill-considered relationship with Lavender and his serious bond with Hermione, which cements rather than fractures the trio's friendship.



Even though Harry hates to think about dating and can't come to grips with his crush on Ginny, he's become a romantic commodity. As in many other spheres of life, he's being asked to grow up more quickly than he would like to.



Harry will actually prove correct on this point, which he arrives at through reasoning, rather than simply his hatred of Draco. As usual, the novel argues that good judgments stem from facts, not feelings.



Ron and Hermione are both taking advantage of the other's insecurities: Hermione capitalizes on Ron's feelings of inferiority, while he seems to chime in with other Hogwarts students who see her as a know-it-all. Although they're hurting each other now, they're each displaying their understanding of the other's character.



Darting out of class in search of Hermione, Harry finds her being comforted by Luna. Impulsively, he invites Luna to Slughorn's party. She's delighted by the suggestion but Ron is appalled, pointing out that Harry could take anyone in the school. Ginny tells him that he's done a nice thing by choosing Luna, which makes him feel glum. At dinner Harry urges Ron to apologize to Hermione, but he refuses and soon disappears into Lavender's embrace.

Harry's willingness to take Luna to the dance stems in part from his knowledge that he could have any date he wanted; Ron is more attentive to social status because no one is boosting his ego in this way. Even though Harry interprets Ginny's comment as a sign of indifference, it shows the strength of her character and her indifference to the social conventions that exclude Luna as an eccentric.



Arriving at the table, Hermione strikes up a bright conversation with Parvati and happens to mention that she's attending Slughorn's party with Cormac McLaggen, whom she's now dating. Ron looks after her as she leaves and Harry muses upon "the depths to which girls would sink to get revenge."

Hermione is demonstrating her emotional intelligence by choosing exactly the date who will annoy Ron the most; but she's not appearing at her most emotionally mature in this moment.



That night, Luna looks odd but nice in her sparkling robes. On the way to Slughorn's office she shares her theory that the Minister of Magic is actually a vampire. When they arrive, they find the room enchanted to look like a lavish tent; Slughorn immediately corners Harry and introduces him to several famous people. To Harry's discomfort, one of them immediately asks to write his biography.

Harry's kindness towards Luna, despite the fact that she obviously doesn't fit into fashionable Wizarding circles, establishes him as essentially different from the wizards who seek to flatter him and write his biography simply because he's currently famous.



Extricating himself, Harry drags Luna towards a very disheveled Hermione, who's just escaped Cormac's embrace. She admits that she just picked him because she knew Ron would be jealous. Harry warns Hermione that no matter how mad she gets at Ron she mustn't tell him that she Confunded Cormac at the tryouts, lest he lose his confidence. Hermione bursts out in frustration, scoffing that just like Cormac all Harry cares about is Quidditch. Seeing her date coming, she disappears.

Telling Harry why she chose to date Cormac, Hermione is essentially admitting her feelings for Ron, but she expresses no embarrassment about doing so. Even though things aren't going her way at the moment, unlike Harry she doesn't see anything shameful in having feelings for someone or wanting to pursue a new romance.



Slughorn reappears and begins telling the crowd what a gifted potioneer Harry is. To Harry's horror, Snape appears and remarks suspiciously that he's never shown much aptitude before. Fortunately, Snape's attention is distracted by Filch, who has caught Draco trying to crash the party. Although Slughorn genially waves him into the party, Harry notices that Draco looks ill. With evident unease, Snape whisks Draco away for a private conference.

This is the first of many references to Draco's deteriorating appearance and increasingly anxious behavior. Although Harry wants to see his enemy as a force of pure and unrepentant evil, it's becoming clear that Draco is troubled by his task and reluctant to carry it out, complicating Harry's condemnation of him.



Harry slips away from the party, as well, donning his Invisibility Cloak and following Snape and Draco down the corridor. He hears Snape warning Draco that he can't afford to make any more mistakes, and that he's made an Unbreakable Vow to help him. Disrespectfully, Draco sneers that the job is his and that Snape just wants to steal credit for his work. He strides away angrily, and Harry waits for Snape to leave before returning slowly to the party.

In a way, the protective stance Snape takes towards Draco mirrors the relationship between Harry and Dumbledore. This sets up another parallel between Harry and the nemesis from whom he wants to consider himself fundamentally different.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN: A VERY FROSTY CHRISTMAS

Home at the Burrow for Christmas, Ron still can't quite believe that Snape was offering Draco help. Their conference is interrupted by the entrance of Fred and George, who tease Ron about his new relationship. When they leave, Ron points out that even if Harry tells Dumbledore about what he heard, the professor will insist that Snape was just trying to find out what Draco is planning. Still, Harry feels justified in his suspicions.

Dumbledore is just as adamant about Snape's loyalty as Harry is convinced of his treachery – and like Harry, he can't or won't provide much hard evidence to back up his claims. In a way, this suggests that all moral judgments are to some extent based on feelings, rather than facts alone.



On Christmas Eve, everyone gathers reluctantly to hear a radio broadcast by Mrs. Weasley's favorite singer. Fleur talks loudly over the music, Fred and George play card games, and Mr. Weasley chats with Harry about his work. Although they've made several arrests, Mr. Weasley doesn't think any of the suspects are actual Death Eaters. Meanwhile, the Ministry is still holding Stan Shunpike because "the top levels want to look as though they're making some progress."

The picture Mr. Weasley draws of the Ministry is one of bafflement and incompetence. Besides being unable to contain Voldemort's rise, the government is actively harming its citizens by making false arrests in its own interests – this could be a nod to real-world fear-mongering against minorities, like Muslims, that occurred in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.



Harry tells Mr. Weasley – as well as Remus Lupin, who is listening in – about the overheard conference between Draco and Snape. Immediately, Mr. Weasley suggests that Snape was just pretending to help him. Lupin severely points out that Dumbledore trusts Snape, which "ought to be good enough for all of us." Although Snape exposed Lupin as a werewolf, forcing him to resign his position at Hogwarts, he also kept him healthy by making him a special potion during his monthly transformation. Lupin neither likes nor dislikes Snape – but personal feelings have nothing to do with his decision to trust him.

Here, Lupin argues strongly against making judgments based on feelings – even though he, of all people, has strong reasons to dislike Snape personally, he refuses to let this affect his conclusions about the man. This pronouncement establishes him as a foil to James Potter and Sirius, who disliked Snape for petty reasons and treated these feelings as a justification for bullying him.



As the broadcast finally ends, Harry asks Lupin what he's been doing. Lupin reveals he's been undercover among the werewolf population, most of whom are sympathetic to Voldemort. They're tired of being shunned by society and believe they'll have a better life under his reign, especially since one of the Dark Lord's top associates is a deranged werewolf named Fenrir Greyback, who now kills for pleasure and specializes in biting children, in the hope of creating an army of werewolves who hate wizards. In fact, it was Greyback who bit Lupin during his youth.

Fenrir Greyback is an appalling character who seems to be beyond redemption. However, his extreme disaffection with Wizarding society demonstrates the extent to which Wizarding society stigmatizes vulnerable minorities, like werewolves. While it often seems that prejudice – like bias against Muggle-borns – exist only within Voldemort's ranks, moments like this are a sobering reminder that it's present in mainstream society, as well.



Harry asks Lupin if he's ever heard of the Half-Blood Prince and explains about the mysterious book he's come to own. Lupin gently disabuses Harry of the notion that it belonged to his father – although Harry once saw James using the Levicorpus spell in Snape's memories, it was an extremely popular jinx at the time and lots of people used it. Lupin advises Harry to figure out how old the book is, as that might lead him to its owner.

Harry falls asleep thumbing his copy of *Advanced Potion-Making*, which turns out to have been published fifty years ago – long before his father was at Hogwarts. He wakes up to Ron's cry of disgust at the Christmas gift he's received from Lavender, an enormous locket engraved with the words "My Sweetheart." Ron wonders why Lavender would think he'd enjoy something like this, but when Harry questions him on the kinds of things they talk about, he admits they mostly just make out. Harry cheers him up by telling him that Hermione and Cormac fell out at Slughorn's Christmas party.

Harry looks through his own pile of presents, which include a sweater from Mrs. Weasley, a pile of joke products from Fred and George, and a bag of maggots from Kreacher. They go down to breakfast, where the atmosphere is tense due to Mrs. Weasley's and Fleur's mutual antipathy. Ginny picks a maggot out of Harry's hair and Mrs. Weasley asks Lupin if he's heard from Tonks lately – the young witch has refused invitations to spend Christmas at the Burrow, and Mrs. Weasley worries she's alone. Harry mentions the strange new form of Tonks' Patronus to Lupin, who shoves some turkey in his mouth.

Suddenly Mrs. Weasley springs to her feet, seeing Percy and Rufus Scrimgeour striding towards the door. While Percy awkwardly hugs his mother, the Minister claims that they were working in the area and "couldn't resist" stopping by. Feigning casualness, he asks Harry to show him the garden while Percy catches up with his family. Lupin and Mr. Weasley seem prepared to intervene, but Harry gets up without a word.

In the garden, Scrimgeour tells Harry that he's been anxious to talk to him, but Dumbledore has prevented him from doing so. Continuing, he says that whether or not Harry is actually "the Chosen One," the public's perception that he's uniquely equipped to fight Voldemort is important to preserving morale. Given this, he wants Harry to start visiting the Ministry, in order to insinuate that he's working with them against the Death Eaters. If he does this, Scrimgeour will introduce him to influential wizards in the Auror Department.

Harry is looking to the potions book to provide some sort of special connection to his father – even if it's just a reminder of his bullying of Snape at Hogwarts. Lupin's tact shows that he understands how much Harry craves parental guidance in his life, even if it just comes from an object his father once owned.



The fact that Ron rarely actually speaks to Lavender establishes this relationship as fundamentally different and more superficial than his relationship with Hermione, which although fractured is based on mutual understanding. The novel argues that while relationships like this can pose a threat to pre-existing friendships, relationships between people who know and trust one another generally don't.



Harry's pile of presents is a reminder of how integrated he is within the Weasley family – after all, during his childhood he was used to being completely ignored by the Dursleys. His secure place among Ron's family makes him a contrast to Lupin and Tonks, who aren't really part of the clan, and seem to lack familial connections of their own.



The unspoken conflict between the Minister of Magic and Mr. Weasley and Lupin sets up familial and governmental figures as diametrically opposed to each other. Since the novel characterizes family in such a strongly positive way, this is another indication that government figures should not be trusted.



Here, Scrimgeour attempts to bribe Harry to pretend to the Wizarding community that the Ministry is closer to catching Voldemort than it actually is. The Minister of Magic clearly isn't concerned about protecting his citizens nearly as much as he cares about retaining and expanding his own power. He emerges as a foil to Dumbledore, who steadfastly pursues Voldemort even when doing so harms him, as with the loss of his hand.



Harry says that he has no desire to endorse the Ministry, especially given the continued scapegoating of Stan Shunpike. Scrimgeour patronizingly responds that, as a teenager, Harry can't possibly understand how the Ministry works. He holds up his hand, which is still scarred from his detention with Umbridge, and reminds Scrimgeour that just last year the Ministry was doing its best to smear his reputation and ignore Voldemort's return.

As Harry states, it's easy for him to dislike the Ministry given its treatment of him last year. At the same time, it's telling that he so completely dismisses the opportunity to make connections at the Auror office, and that he sticks up for people who are being unfairly villainized by society. His ability to resist the temptation of celebrity emphasizes the inherent authenticity of his character.



Changing tactics, Scrimgeour asks what Dumbledore does when he's away from Hogwarts; Harry responds that even if he knew, he wouldn't tell. He reminds Scrimgeour that Fudge also pitted himself against Dumbledore, and the headmaster has retained power longer than the former Minister. Scrimgeour accuses Harry of being "Dumbledore's man through and through," and Harry proudly affirms that he is.

Harry's strong defense of Dumbledore emphasizes the extent to which the professor has become a father figure to him – he speaks not just out of political loyalty but deep personal regard. His growing closeness with the headmaster will make the novel's final events even more devastating.



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: A SLUGGISH MEMORY

A few days later, Harry and the Weasleys return to Hogwarts through the Floo Network. Mrs. Weasley bids them a tearful farewell – she's been anxious and upset ever since Percy stormed from the house with Scrimgeour. At Gryffindor tower they meet Hermione, who enthusiastically greets Harry while ignoring Ron, who soon vanishes into Lavender's arms. Harry quietly begs Hermione to make up with Ron, but she stonily refuses.

In his relationship to the government, Percy is diametrically opposed to Harry: while Harry turns down connections with the Ministry because of its moral lapses, Percy pursues government connections at any cost. It's no surprise that his mercenary approach to his career has alienated him from his family.



Instead, Harry updates her on the events of the holidays. When he mentions Lupin's account of Fenrir Greyback, Hermione eagerly points out that they heard Draco using his name to threaten Borgin. Harry sees this as proof that Draco is a Death Eater, but Hermione is still reluctant to subscribe to this theory.

As the novel progresses, Harry gradually transitions from simply suspecting Draco of wrongdoing based on his personal biases to actually collecting factual evidence against him.



The sixth-years are excited to learn that they'll be receiving Apparition lessons this year – they'll finally be able to transport themselves at will, like their parents and older siblings. When Ron mentions that Harry has already Apparated alongside an adult, everyone makes him recount the sensation. Hermione and Ron queue together to sign up for lessons, but when Lavender arrives to greet her boyfriend as "Won-Won," Hermione stalks off.

Being able to Apparate alone is one of the hallmarks of adulthood in the Wizarding world. Their excitement over the lessons shows that Ron, Harry, and Hermione still see growing up as a series of positive milestones, while by the end of the novel it will have assumed a more negative and threatening form.



That night, Harry goes to Dumbledore's office for another lesson. Dumbledore is unsurprised when Harry reports his conversation with Scrimgeour, since before his resignation, Fudge had been begging him for access to Harry. When Harry repeats what he told Scrimgeour about being "Dumbledore's man," the professor's eyes grow watery and Harry looks down in embarrassment.

Even though Harry declared his allegiance to Dumbledore in response to Scrimgeour's political maneuver, to both him and Dumbledore, this has personal connotations. Dumbledore's emotional response suggests that he is becoming as attached to Harry as Harry is to him.



However, when Harry repeats the overheard conversation between Snape and Draco, Dumbledore seems unsurprised and urges Harry to forget about it. He's even a little testy when Harry questions his trust in Snape.

Although Harry is still annoyed, Dumbledore changes the subject to the memories he wishes to share tonight. He recalls that when Tom Riddle arrived at Hogwarts, he proved himself an unusually gifted student, becoming the favorite of many teachers. Although Dumbledore kept a close eye on Tom, he chose not to discuss their first encounter with anyone, hoping the boy had chosen to make a fresh start. As he got older, Riddle cultivated a group of devoted acolytes who basked in his growing power – precursors to the Death Eaters, they were suspected of causing a number of “nasty incidents,” although never actually caught.

The few people willing to recount memories of Riddle testify to his obsession with his ancestry and never-ceasing hope that his father was a wizard. After accepting that his father never went to Hogwarts, he turned his attention to his mother's family and set off to find the Gaunts.

Entering the Pensieve, Harry sees that he's again in the Gaunt cottage, which is occupied by Morfin, now old and drunk. The door opens and a handsome boy, Tom Riddle, appears. Morfin stands up and moves to attack him, but Riddle orders him to stop in Parseltongue. Drunkenly, Morfin tells the visitor that he looks like his father, who has returned to the village after leaving Merope. He calls his sister a “slut,” saying she “dishonored” the family. At this, Morfin's memory goes dark – Dumbledore explains that Morfin wakes up in the morning to find his family ring gone, but he can remember nothing.

Meanwhile, Voldemort travels to the village of Little Hangleton and kills his Tom Riddle Sr. and his grandparents. While the Muggle authorities are confounded by the crime, the Ministry blames Morfin, who's already known as a Muggle-hater. Morfin admits to the murders, seeming proud at the idea of committing them, and lives out his life in Azkaban. Dumbledore hypothesizes that Riddle used Morfin's wand to kill the Muggles and then planted a false memory in his uncle's head. Only with a great deal of magic was Dumbledore able to coax out the real memory of Voldemort's visit; he tries to use it as evidence to secure Morfin's release, but Morfin dies before the Ministry makes a decision.

Even though Dumbledore is preparing Harry for adulthood, he still reserves the right to make decisions and moral judgments for himself.



Tom Riddle's menacing gang at Hogwarts is a notable foil to Harry's group of friends. While Harry's trio is responsible for righting a number of wrongs at the school, Riddle's group actively perpetrates injustice. Moreover, while Harry views his friends as respected equals and shares decision-making power with them, Riddle clearly views the other students as subordinates and isolates himself by insisting on his superiority.



Like his grandfather Marvolo, Riddle's self-esteem depends on considering himself part of a wealthy and powerful family. However, unlike Marvolo he will recognize and disdain how far the Gaunts have fallen from their ancient position.



Morfin's vulgar description of his sister is an extreme example of the chauvinistic male behavior on display throughout the novel, even from Harry and Ron. It's also telling that even though Morfin and Riddle are related, there's no intimacy between them – the Gaunts have become so fractured by their materialistic and bigoted values that there's no room for family closeness anymore.



Morfin is clearly an odious person – he's already committed hate crimes against Muggles, and he admits to further crimes he didn't commit just because he likes the sound of them. Despite this, Dumbledore actively tries to free him after learning that he's been imprisoned unjustly. Dumbledore's behavior suggests that the protections of law apply to even the most loathsome people, who should be treated based on the facts of their behavior rather than personal feelings about it.



Dumbledore pours another memory – the most important of his collection – into the Pensieve, and the two dive in. Harry immediately recognizes a young Professor Slughorn relaxing in his office, surrounded by several teenage boys – including Tom Riddle. Slughorn is wagging his finger at Riddle and jokingly scolding him for being able to “know things [he] shouldn’t” and flatter the right people. Suddenly, a thick fog fills the memory. Harry can see nothing, but he hears Slughorn’s voice loudly intone, “You’ll go wrong, boy, mark my words.”

Just as suddenly, the fog clears and Slughorn begins to send the boys to bed. Riddle lingers in his office and asks Slughorn what he knows about [Horcruxes](#). Again, fog fills the room and Harry hears Slughorn say sternly that he knows nothing about them and wouldn’t tell Riddle if he did. With that, the memory ends.

Harry doesn’t understand what’s so important about this memory – until Dumbledore explains that Slughorn has “tampered” with it, probably because he’s ashamed of his original actions. To Harry’s surprise, Dumbledore says that his “homework” is to persuade Slughorn to reveal his real memory. Slughorn is too canny a wizard to be defeated by magical means, so the only way to gain the memory is through a personal connection.

Interestingly, Slughorn treats Riddle much the same as he does Harry – showing that both young teenagers display the ambition and talent that is so valuable to the professor. However, the fact that Slughorn chose Riddle as a protégée despite his increasingly malicious character demonstrates that the professor’s values are inherently flawed and his regard for material success is not just annoying but pernicious.



Rather than accepting the fact that his conduct hasn’t always been exemplary, Slughorn presents an altered representation of the past in which his moral character is unequivocally upright. In a way, he’s as eager to see people as either good or evil as Harry.



While Dumbledore applauds Harry for refusing to use his personal celebrity to gain contacts at the Ministry, he also wants him to employ it to persuade Slughorn. Part of Dumbledore’s lessons is teaching Harry how to use his fame wisely and responsibly, rather than letting it govern his life.



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: BIRTHDAY SURPRISES

Although Ron and Hermione still aren’t speaking, Harry tells them both about his new assignment. Ron is sure that Harry can get anything out of Slughorn, who loves him; but Hermione is perplexed, as even she has no idea what a [Horcrux](#) is. Ron thinks that Harry should approach Slughorn after Potions but when he shares this plan with Hermione, she explodes in frustration, asking sarcastically “when Won-Won’s judgment has ever been faulty.”

Today’s assignment in Potions is to create an antidote to a given poison. Except for Hermione, no one understands the principles behind the task; without precise instructions from his book, even Harry can’t perform it. He doesn’t want to be revealed as a fake, especially not today, so he’s excited to see that at the bottom of a list of popular antidotes in the book, the Prince has scrawled “bezoars.” Harry remembers Snape describing this magical stone as a protection from most poison, so he retrieves one from the supply closet and shows it to Slughorn in place of a brewed antidote. Slughorn thinks it’s a fantastic joke, but Hermione is furious.

Generally, Harry relies on both Ron and Hermione to help him confront problems; however, the conflict over Lavender has made group planning almost impossible. This disastrous relationship doesn’t just cause discord between Ron and Hermione, it strengthens Harry’s belief that romance is inherently threatening to friendship.



The fact that the Half-Blood Prince’s instructions have saved Harry once again increases his trust in the book, even though he still knows nothing about its origins or the character of its original owner. Although Harry is constantly arguing against blind trust of Snape and Draco, when it’s convenient for him he also extends blind trust to people who might not deserve it.



When the bell rings, Harry lingers behind and without preamble asks Slughorn what he knows about [Horcruxes](#). Slughorn grows pale and immediately deduces that Harry is acting on Dumbledore's orders; he says forcefully that he knows nothing about Horcruxes and leaves the room in anger. Resentful of his stunt with the bezoar, neither Ron nor Hermione is particularly sympathetic about his failure. Harry decides to drop the issue for now and cultivate a closer relationship with Slughorn. Hermione scours the library for references to Horcruxes, without any success.

Meanwhile, the sixth-years gather for their first Apparition lessons. As everyone spreads out to practice, Harry positions himself right behind Draco, who is having a heated argument with Crabbe. He hears his nemesis sharply admonish his sidekick that he and Goyle have to keep watch for him without asking questions. Harry taunts Draco that he always tells his friends what he's doing if he wants them to keep watch, but as Malfoy draws his wand McGonagall shouts for him to be quiet.

The instructor explains the procedure for Apparating inside a small hoop in the floor. However, when the students actually try most of them just fall over. No one manages to Apparate successfully, although Susan Bones briefly severs one of her legs in the attempt.

As he leaves the Great Hall, Harry sees Draco rushing off ahead. He runs to his dormitory and produces the Marauders' Map, looking for his nemesis. Ron soon finds him in the Slytherin common room, but Harry decides to keep an eye on him from now on. In the next few days he finds nothing unusual. Crabbe and Goyle frequently wander around the castle, but they do so without Draco – who, in fact, sometimes disappears off the map altogether.

Ron is disgruntled to find that a Hogsmeade trip scheduled for his birthday has been cancelled due to security concerns. On Ron's birthday morning, Harry watches him open presents while rummaging through his trunk for the Marauder's Map. He barely looks at the watch Ron has received from his parents, too busy scouring the map for Draco, who isn't visible anywhere in the castle. Ron offers Harry a chocolate from one of his birthday packages, but Harry turns it down.

Unsurprisingly, Hermione was right in predicting that Ron's plan wouldn't work. At the same time, her inability to find any mention of Horcruxes in the library suggests that the group's usual methods of going about a difficult task won't work this time.



Like the young Tom Riddle and his gang, Draco and his sidekicks Crabbe and Goyle are foils to Harry and his friends. Draco constantly treats the other two boys like servants, expecting them to support him without telling them what he's doing. Ultimately this makes him vulnerable, while Harry's trio's more equitable dynamic contributes to their strength.



If being able to Apparate is a test of adulthood, the difficulty of achieving this feat reflects that growing up is rarely a seamless process – even in the world that existed prior to Voldemort's rise.



As an orphan, Harry often feels that he lacks parental care; however, in bequeathing him the Marauders' Map, which helps him solve many dilemmas and contributes to his investigations now, his father is effectively aiding him from beyond the grave.



Harry's growing obsession with Draco doesn't just take up his time, it affects his behavior toward his friends. At this point, it's seeming less like a legitimate investigation into wrongdoing and more like an unhealthy manifestation of his general anxieties, which isolates him from those around him.



In frustration, Harry finally puts the map away; but when he turns back to Ron, his friend is staring strangely into space. To Harry's surprise, Ron says that he's not hungry and doesn't want to come to breakfast. Suddenly, he bursts out that he "can't stop thinking about" a woman who "doesn't know he exists." Thinking he's talking about Lavender, Harry sarcastically reassures Ron that his girlfriend is too busy snogging him to be unaware of his existence. Shockingly, Ron says that he's talking about Romilda Vane, with whom he's in love.

Harry thinks Ron is joking and turns to leave – only for his friend to punch him across the face. Reacting instinctively, Harry hoists Ron into the air with the Levicorpus spell, then sees the box of chocolates lying on the floor and realizes they were the ones Romilda once gave Harry, rather than a present for Ron. They must have fallen off his bed. Harry tries to explain this to Ron, but he's completely dazed by the love potion and only asks Harry to introduce him to Romilda.

Harry is tempted to laugh at Ron and see what he does under the effects of the potion, but he reflects that they're "supposed to be friends." Letting Ron down, he blithely says that they should go to Professor Slughorn's office, where Romilda is receiving extra Potions tutoring. On their way, they run into an enthusiastic Lavender whom Ron rudely brushes off, telling her that he's going to meet Romilda.

When a bleary-eyed Slughorn answers his office door, Harry quietly asks if he can brew an antidote for the potion. Reluctantly, he lets them in. While he brews the antidote, Ron looks around anxiously, awaiting Romilda's arrival. Slughorn gives Ron a drink, telling him it will soothe his nerves; as soon as he downs it, his face fills with dejection and he collapses onto an armchair. Slughorn remarks that he needs something to cheer him up and opens a bottle of mead, which he was intending to give to Dumbledore for Christmas.

Downing his glass of mead before the other two, Ron falls to the floor immediately, foaming at the mouth. Harry yells for Slughorn to do something, but the professor just looks on in horror. Frantically, Harry rifles through his supply cabinet until he finds a bezoar, which he shoves into his friend's mouth. Ron shudders once and then lies limp and still.

Even though Ron's passion for Romilda is clearly engineered by a love potion, it also echoes his relationship with Lavender – sudden in onset, and based on obsession and infatuation rather than long-standing friendship and trust. In a sense, this episode helps differentiate Ron's feelings for Lavender from those for Hermione.



The fact that Ron has unwittingly ingested such a strong potion, which Romilda tried to slip Harry, reflects the danger to which Harry's fame exposes him, even from well-meaning people.



Even though Harry is often reluctant to think about his feelings or those of other people, here he takes care of Ron when his friend is most vulnerable. Meanwhile, the love potion does have an unintended benefit in sparking the unraveling of Ron and Lavender's relationship.



Even though it elicits all the emotions of love – from euphoria to despair – in Ron, the potion doesn't actually cause real love. In this sense, it's a warning to both Ron and Harry to examine the source of their emotions, rather than blindly following their dictates.



This is one of many instances in the novel when a normally capable adult falls short in a crisis. Even though Slughorn is the Potions professor, it's only Harry who's clearheaded enough to find an antidote – he's forced to demonstrate his maturity in this situation.



CHAPTER NINETEEN: ELF TAILS

That night, Harry sits by Ron's bed in the infirmary with Ginny, Hermione, Fred and George. The twins, who arrived at Hogwarts to celebrate their brother's birthday, ask Harry to repeat the story for the umpteenth time. Each time he thinks about what would have happened if there was no bezoar on hand, he goes cold. Ginny wonders if the Death Eaters are trying to intimidate Slughorn, but it's also intriguing that the mead was originally intended for Dumbledore. Everyone has been speculating obsessively as to how the mead was poisoned except Hermione, who has been sitting white-faced and quiet all day. Suddenly Ron, who has been still all day, croaks out her name.

Hagrid strides into the room, having just received the news. He's shocked that something so bad could have happened to someone so inoffensive as Ron. Next to arrive are Mr. Weasley and Mrs. Weasley. Hugging Harry, Ron's mother says that he's saved the lives of half their family. Harry is embarrassed and doesn't know what to say.

As Harry walks out of the hospital wing with Hermione and Hagrid, the giant says that Dumbledore is "worried sick" about continuing attacks within the castle; it's even possible that the Hogwarts board might try to shut down the school. Hagrid muses that it's no wonder Dumbledore is mad at Snape – before realizing he shouldn't speak of this to Harry and clamming up. However, when Harry presses him, Hagrid admits that he overheard an argument in which Snape said that Dumbledore was taking him for granted and Dumbledore retorted that Snape must perform investigations within Slytherin, as well as some sort of mysterious task.

While Hermione goes to bed, Harry sits in the common room to think. He hypothesizes that Dumbledore is angry because Snape has failed to investigate Draco's actions sufficiently. He wonders why Dumbledore told him that his trust in Snape is unshaken; maybe he feels that Harry is too young to know all his suspicions. He's jerked out of his reverie by Cormac, who has already heard about Ron's attack and is eager to take over his position on the Quidditch team. Reluctantly, Harry agrees.

It's telling that Harry can't stop thinking about the bezoar – rather than seeing himself as a hero who can solve anything, he's humble and appreciates the fact that he depended on luck to help him. Meanwhile, it's clear that this crisis is going to cause a reconciliation between Ron and Hermione. Even though these successive breaches in Hogwarts security are a source of general anxiety, they also encourage people to examine their priorities and value their friendships.



Harry is uneasy when Mrs. Weasley describes the family as dependent on him because he wants to think of himself as sheltered by the clan, rather than having to protect it himself.



Even though Dumbledore has been very forthright and honest with Harry, he still paints a picture in which Hogwarts' safety and the general situation is under his control. Conversely, Hagrid's remarks show that even Dumbledore is anxious and unsure about the future. Compounding the adult role Harry has just played in saving Ron, he has to accept that the strongest authority figures in his life might not be able to cope with the danger facing him.



Harry immediately interprets Hagrid's comments as a sign of Dumbledore's mistrust of Snape, even though there are many other ways to see the situation. In order to truly become an adult and fight Voldemort alone, he will have to overcome these personal biases and develop more clearheaded judgment.



For once in his life, Harry doesn't care that much about Quidditch; he's too busy stalking Draco's location on the map and wondering what he's up to when he seems to vanish. However, he himself is being hounded by Cormac, keen to share Quidditch strategy and criticism of the rest of the team, and Lavender, who wants to have "in-depth chats with him about Ron's feelings." When she complains that Ron is always asleep when she visits the hospital wing, Harry realizes that his friend has been faking to avoid his girlfriend. Lavender even questions him about Hermione, whom she claims is only interested in Ron after his "interesting" brush with death.

On the morning of the match, Harry reassures Ron that he's not going to keep Cormac as Keeper and advises him to break up with Lavender before she drives them both crazy. On his way down to the pitch he encounters Draco, accompanied by two young girls. Of course, Draco refuses to say where he's going, but Harry doesn't have time to follow him. In the locker room, Ginny scolds Harry for being distracted and Harry snaps at Cormac, who is busy giving instructions to the rest of the team.

Harry is shocked but amused to find that Luna has replaced Zacharias Smith as commentator. With her typical honesty, she reminisces about the last match, in which Ginny crashed into Smith on purpose. Busy criticizing everyone else, Cormac lets in several goals; in the middle of the game, Harry sees him grab a bat from one of the Beaters and demonstrate how to use it. He flies up to Cormac in fury, but the Keeper mishits an oncoming Bludger right into his face.

Harry wakes up several hours later in the hospital wing next to Ron, who is thrilled at Cormac's disgrace and still chuckling at Luna's commentary. Ron mentions that Ginny came by to see him and Harry conjures up a dramatic scene in which she confesses her feelings for him and Ron gives his "blessing."

However, it seems that Ginny only visited to tell Ron that Harry was almost late for the match. Harry confesses that he ran into Draco and almost followed him, and Ron scolds Harry for neglecting his duty as Quidditch captain and indulging this narrow-minded obsession. Harry wishes that he had powers like Scrimgeour's, so he could assign people to tail Draco. Suddenly he remembers that he can do this – impulsively, he summons Kreacher.

Even though Lavender often appears silly, it's hard not to pity her – she's being ignored in favor of another woman, and she knows it. Harry's complete disregard for her feelings reflects his tendency to dismiss people he doesn't completely respect, rather than appreciating their complexity or identifying with their problems. After all, the object of his affection seems to be interested in someone else; he does have some concerns in common with Lavender



Just as it did while Ron was opening his birthday presents, Harry's obsession with Draco is distracting him from something that's normally extremely important in his life: Quidditch. In a way, his unhealthy obsession and inability to focus mirrors Draco's increasing air of sickness and paranoia. It's another undesired similarity between Harry and his nemesis.



Even though Cormac is a Gryffindor, he emerges as an important foil to Harry. While Harry fosters collaboration on the Quidditch team and doesn't trumpet his own abilities, Cormac's conviction that he knows everything actively harms the team's performance.



It's troubling that Harry's dream of a relationship with Ginny is so contingent on Ron's blessing. Ginny is entitled to date whomever he wants, and if Ron's controlling behavior imperils his friendships that's his fault, not his sister's or Harry's.



Even though, as Hermione points out, Ron doesn't always exercise good judgment, in this case he's a voice of reason, encouraging Harry not to let his feelings run away from him. The fact that Harry actively wants to be like Scrimgeour, whom he regards as a tyrant, underscores the fact that acting on his feelings causes him to abandon his best instincts.



Kreacher appears in the hospital wing in the midst of a fistfight with Dobby, who has apparently attacked him for insulting Harry's honor. Harry pulls them apart and forbids them from fighting. To Dobby's delight and Kreacher's great disgust, Harry informs them that he'd like them to follow Draco and report on his actions. Kreacher is incensed that he has to spy on a pure-blood and Harry forbids him from contacting Draco in any way. Dobby eagerly promises to throw himself from a castle tower if he fails in his task.

Dobby is a free elf, so he's doing Harry's bidding as a favor, not out of compulsion. On the contrary, Harry is taking advantage of the fact that he legally "owns" Kreacher to make him do something he doesn't want to do. In this sense, he's reenacting Sirius's imperious behavior towards the elf, which eventually led to his demise.



CHAPTER TWENTY: LORD VOLDEMORT'S REQUEST

The silver lining of Ron's poisoning is that Hermione has abandoned her grudge and is now friends with them again. Even better, she tells them that Ginny has fought with her boyfriend because Dean laughed at Harry's injury. As Harry digests this information – claiming to a suspicious Hermione that he only cares about the dynamics of his Quidditch team – Hermione stops before a terrified first-year girl who has dropped her brass scales and quickly repairs them.

Even though Harry is reluctant to speak about his crush on Ginny and Ron is oblivious to it, Hermione has somehow deduced his feelings. Her ability to intuit what other people are thinking, compared to Ron's inability to understand the feelings she actively demonstrates, displays her superior emotional maturity.



Luna arrives with a message from Dumbledore, summoning Harry to another lesson. Ron is flustered to see Lavender approaching behind her. Harry and Ron speed away from the incipient argument; although Ron gives no details once he rejoins them, he doesn't talk to Lavender for the rest of the day. Hermione is in an exceptionally good mood and helps Harry with his homework, even though she knows he'll let Ron copy.

Harry has always worried that a relationship between Ron and Hermione would tear the friend group apart; however, as such a development appears to be imminent, the trio is also growing much closer and more cohesive than before, showing that not all romance is threatening to friendship.



Harry arrives in Dumbledore's office as he's finishing a meeting with Professor Trelawney. When Dumbledore asks Harry what progress he's made with Slughorn, he's abashed, having largely forgotten about it since Ron's poisoning. Although he makes some feeble excuses, Dumbledore remarks sternly that after Ron's recovery, Harry should have remembered the importance of his task and exercised his "considerable ingenuity" to fulfill it. Harry feels that this "cold disappointment" is much worse than anger.

Harry's forgetfulness about the assignment reflects a reluctance to believe that Dumbledore has truly assigned him a critical task and expects him to behave like an adult. It's also telling that Harry's remorse stems from his desire for Dumbledore to think positively of him – in his relationship with the professor, respect is a much better motivator than fear.



After an uncomfortable silence, Harry apologizes sincerely for not having given the matter more attention. Dumbledore quietly acknowledges this and changes the subject to Voldemort's murky life after Hogwarts. Having become a top student and Head Boy by his last year at school, Tom Riddle confounded expectations by going to work at Borgin and Burkes. He also approached the current headmaster about teaching Defense Against the Dark Arts at Hogwarts. Dumbledore theorizes that he wanted to influence a new generation of students, or that he had a genuine attachment to the school, which was "the first and only place he had felt at home."

Even though this is a comparatively small matter, Harry has acknowledged the fact that he did something wrong, and Dumbledore has absolved him from this transgression and allowed him to move on. Instead of judging other people for their flaws, Harry is learning to appreciate his own fallibility as well as the possibility of personal change in which Dumbledore so strongly believes.



At Borgin and Burkes, Voldemort quickly rose through the ranks and was often sent to persuade people to sell their valuable antiques. Standing by the Pensieve, Dumbledore draws Harry into the memory of a house-elf Hokey, who is tying the shoelaces of her mistress, Hepzibah Smith, in the midst of a living room overstuffed with luxurious furniture, books, and statuettes. The doorbell rings and Tom Riddle enters; more handsome than ever, he presents a bouquet of flowers, which Hepzibah flirtatiously accepts.

Riddle begins to negotiate for some armor that Burke wants to buy, but Hepzibah interrupts him, offering to show him treasures that no one else knows she owns. She orders Hokey to bring over two leather boxes. In the first is a golden chalice that once belonged to Helga Hufflepuff; letting Riddle hold it briefly, Hepzibah doesn't seem to notice "the shadow that crossed Voldemort's face" as she takes it away.

The second box reveals a large golden necklace; holding it up, Riddle immediately deduces that it once belonged to Slytherin. Hepzibah says she bought the necklace from Burke, who himself acquired it from a poor woman who had no idea what it was worth. Harry sees Riddle's eyes go "scarlet," and for a moment he thinks that Riddle won't return the locket. However, after a minute he lets it slip back into the box.

Dumbledore pulls Harry out of the memory and tells him that Hepzibah Smith died two days after this episode. Having admitted to putting a substance she thought was sugar but was actually a lethal poison in her mistress's cocoa, Hokey herself was convicted of the crime. Harry remarks that the Ministry was probably predisposed to blame her because she was a house-elf. Meanwhile, Hepzibah's family notices that her two most valuable possessions are missing and Tom Riddle suddenly vanishes from his job.

Thinking over this episode, Dumbledore remarks that Riddle killed not for revenge, as with his father, but to gain trophies – the same reason that he bullied children in his orphanage. Harry remarks that this behavior is insane, but Dumbledore says he probably thought the locket was rightfully his and wanted to own the cup as a stronger connection to Hogwarts.

It's important that many of Dumbledore's memories come from people often ignored by mainstream society – the eccentric Morfin, overworked Hokey, and even Burke, who's usually dismissed as a mere shopkeeper. Combatting Voldemort is less a matter of heroic individual conduct than of listening to marginalized people and putting together the clues they offer.



Hepzibah allows her feelings for Riddle to cloud her judgment, and this is what ultimately causes her demise. Although Harry doesn't seem to realize it now, it's a lesson on forming moral judgments based on emotional impulses.



When Harry heard how Merope was forced to sell the necklace, he felt pity for the woman's vulnerability; however, Voldemort doesn't seem to identify with his mother at all. Instead, he feels rage to have started his life in such an impoverished and ignominious state. Family is without value to him unless it confers status.



Just as he did to his Uncle Morfin, Voldemort pins his crime on someone he knows the Ministry is likely to suspect. His ability capitalize on biases within the Wizarding world reveals not only his malice but the extent to which that society is flawed and weakened by its close-mindedness.



It's interesting that Voldemort has such a strong and apparently heartfelt connection to Hogwarts – he relates to the school much as Harry does. As with other events in the villain's early life, this creates a sense of similarity between him and the boy he's chosen as his enemy.



Finally, Dumbledore produces one of his own recollections, the last thing he has to share with Harry until they obtain Slughorn's memory. Harry dives into the Pensieve and finds himself back in the same office, looking at a younger version of his professor. The door opens and Riddle enters; no longer a handsome young man, his face seems "waxy and oddly distorted." Dumbledore politely refuses to address his pupil by the new name he has adopted. Riddle unctuously commends Dumbledore for remaining at Hogwarts, rather than seeking a more glamorous job, before announcing that he has returned to seek a teaching position at the school.

With composure, Dumbledore says that frightening rumors have reached him about Riddle's activities; Riddle dismisses this, saying that people are jealous of his greatness and his knowledge of magic. Dumbledore remarks that, while his former pupil is knowledgeable in some areas, he's "woefully ignorant" in others; Riddle responds leeringly that no evidence supports Dumbledore's famous theory that love is the most powerful form of magic.

Dumbledore remarks on the sinister group of acolytes Riddle has cultivated. Many of them, calling themselves Death Eaters, are waiting for him in Hogsmeade at this minute. It's odd that he would return to his old school surrounded by henchmen. Seeing that he's not going to get a job, Riddle stands up to leave; Dumbledore sadly wishes that Riddle were young again and could be frightened into repenting of his actions.

As Voldemort leaves, Harry and Dumbledore exit the memory. Dumbledore says that he doesn't know exactly why Voldemort wanted the job, but will share his hypotheses after Harry acquires Slughorn's memory. He believes the school's subsequent inability to retain a Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher is Voldemort's revenge.

Although Harry doesn't yet know it, Voldemort's "distorted" appearance indicates the extent to which he has destroyed his own humanity. Even though the Horcruxes give him immortality, by taking away human feelings like love and empathy they ultimately make him vulnerable. Although Harry and Voldemort have similar origins, the values they develop ultimately separate them and make Harry a serious opponent to the villain.



Riddle automatically dismisses Dumbledore's theory, but in fact it's Lily Potter's love that will eventually protect Harry from Voldemort's curse. In this sense, Riddle underscores Dumbledore's lesson to Harry that he should interrogate the things that frighten him – like Voldemort's past – rather than cultivating his own ignorance about them.



Growing up is supposed to be a positive experience, emphasizing all the possibilities that lie before a young person. However, Dumbledore seems to view it as a tragic end to a period in which Voldemort's character had the potential to change. For Voldemort, coming of age means the stagnation, rather than the growth, of character.



Dumbledore's unhurried revelation of Voldemort's secrets gives Harry the sense that the professor is powerful and secure in his role as protector, and that there's plenty of time to learn from him – two beliefs that will turn out, unfortunately, to be false.



CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: THE UNKNOWABLE ROOM

For the next week, Harry wonders how he can achieve success with Slughorn. He takes to leafing through his Potions book for advice, even though Hermione thinks it has nothing useful to say. Ignoring her, he notices an incantation labeled "for enemies" and earmarks the page. The trio are sitting in the Gryffindor common room, finishing homework and fretting over their upcoming Apparition tests.

Harry's adult task – evading the defenses of a faculty member – contrasts with the trio's familiar activity of sharing homework and anxieties. Even though he's excited to take on a bigger role in fighting Voldemort, Harry understandably feels like a teenager and doesn't want to give up the routines that are comforting to him.



Hermione argues that if Dumbledore thinks only Harry can acquire the memory, the task has to do with his personal characteristics, not with figuring out some obscure spell or potion. She turns her attention to Ron, whose quill is malfunctioning and causing him to spell every word wrong. She begins magically correcting his essay while he lies back tiredly, saying he loves her. Tersely, she warns him not to let Lavender hear things like this. Ron says he hopes she does; then she'll ditch him rather than clinging to him like a "giant squid."

When everyone has gone to bed except the trio, Kreacher and Dobby suddenly appear in the common room. Harry hasn't told Hermione about his investigations, since she strongly disapproves of house-elf labor; indeed, she's incensed that, because Harry casually told them to follow Draco around the clock, they haven't slept in a week. Kreacher praises Draco's bearing and "nobility," but Dobby says that Malfoy is often "keen to avoid detection" and uses many other students to keep watch while he sneaks into the Room of Requirement. Harry realizes that this is why he hasn't been able to see Draco on the map.

It's impossible for Dobby to get into the Room of Requirement without knowing why Draco is using it, so Harry releases the elves for now. Hermione kindly commends Kreacher on his work, but he calls her a Mudblood before disappearing. Hermione wonders why Draco is using so many different students as lookouts – but suddenly Harry realizes that Draco has been simply using Slughorn's Polyjuice Potion to disguise Crabbe and Goyle. The small girls who have appeared with Draco, as well as the student whose scales Hermione repaired, were actually his sidekicks in disguise.

Before going to bed, Hermione reminds Harry that his job is to get Slughorn's memory, not track Draco. Still, he lies awake all night wondering why Draco is using the Room of Requirement. The next day, he decides to follow him during his free period; after all, he still has no idea how to approach Slughorn, so he might as well use this time productively. At breakfast, Hermione reports several new attacks and the imprisonment of Mundungus Fletcher for burglary.

Under the Invisibility Cloak, Harry approaches the Room of Requirement and paces outside of it, thinking determinedly that he needs to see what it becomes for Draco. However, no matter how many formulations of this request he tries, no door reveals itself in the wall. Arriving late to Defense Against the Dark Arts he loses ten points for Gryffindor and is taunted by Snape for insufficiently answering a question on the difference between ghosts and Inferi.

The newly warm dynamic between Ron and Hermione bodes well for their romantic future as well as the tranquility of their friend group. It's especially positive to see Ron appreciating Hermione's intelligence (if only for his own benefit) rather than deriding it. However, the trio's shared derision towards Lavender shows that they're much better at empathizing with each other than with people outside their insular group.



As always, Hermione acts as the group's moral compass, encouraging Harry to examine the ethical implications of his actions. While it's clear that Kreacher has a bias towards Draco and Dobby is the more trustworthy witness, the house-elves' differing accounts also emphasize the extent to which the same actions can be viewed in radically different lights.



While almost everyone has given up on "reforming" Kreacher, Hermione insists that he has the potential to change. Her belief in personal redemption likens her to Dumbledore. While Kreacher doesn't appear for the rest of this book, in the seventh installment he'll prove Hermione correct, changing his own behavior and providing critical help to the trio.



The increasingly casual nature in which Hermione and the novel itself document these attacks shows how inured the trio has become to the danger in their lives. For them, coming of age doesn't mean learning about the possibilities of adult life but "toughening up" to face the outside world.



Harry's obsession with Draco is now interfering even with his class attendance. Although this might seem foolhardy on Harry's part, it also reflects his growing awareness that the skills he learns in class and his Hogwarts qualifications in general have limited utility in the immediate fight against Voldemort.



Trying to ditch Lavender after class, Ron and Harry duck into a bathroom, where they run into Moaning Myrtle. She's disappointed to see them, having expected another boy who had promised to visit her. Ron is amused by the idea of Myrtle having a crush on someone, but Myrtle resentfully says that she has a lot of common with him: they're both sensitive and have been bullied, and they both cry in the bathroom sometimes. When Ron insults her again, she vanishes in disgust.

That weekend, Ron and Hermione go to Hogsmeade for additional Apparition practice. Since he can't take the test until he turns seventeen later in the summer, Harry tries to enter the Room of Requirement again – even though Hermione insists he should talk to Slughorn instead. Under the Invisibility Cloak, Harry frightens Goyle away from the wall where he's standing guard; but he's again unable to gain entry to the room.

Just as he's losing hope, Harry sees Tonks walking towards him. He's surprised to find her in the castle, but she says she's come to see Dumbledore, who's away. She absentmindedly asks if he's heard from anyone in the Order recently, but when Harry says he hasn't gotten mail since Sirius dies her eyes fill with tears and she strides away. When Ron and Hermione return from practice, Harry tells them of this strange encounter. He wonders aloud if she was in love with Sirius – after all, any mention of him upsets her and her Patronus is something furry and four-legged, not unlike his dog form.

Hermione is still confused as to why Tonks is coming to visit Dumbledore instead of remaining at her station in Hogsmeade. Ron shrugs and says that women are “easily upset.” Hermione sharply points out that Ron is the one who spent the morning sulking because Madam Rosmerta didn't laugh at his stupid joke.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: AFTER THE BURIAL

Before the Apparition test in the afternoon, the trio sits in a courtyard doing homework and trying to avoid Lavender. A small girl approaches with a tear-stained letter from Hagrid, announcing that Aragog has died and begging them to come to the funeral that night. Ron is incensed, since the spider once tried to kill him, and Hermione doesn't want to leave the safety of the castle at night. They decide not to go.

Typically, Ron views other people's emotions as embarrassing weaknesses – even though he himself has suffered over a crush and has felt vulnerable to social pressure. Ron's inability to identify with others does him a disservice here – Myrtle could have revealed some crucial information right now, but she chooses not to because he alienates her.



By normal Wizarding standards, Harry has a long way to go to become an adult; the fact that he won't be able to legally Apparate for months shows how young he is, even compared to his classmates. But at this moment he's trying to track down the people who have infiltrated Hogwarts for nefarious purposes – showing how irrelevant those standards have become in marking adulthood.



This line of thinking is more characteristic of Hermione than Harry – he's displaying awareness (however misguided) of Tonks' emotions and approaching the subject without embarrassment. Perhaps the fact that he too has grieved deeply for Sirius that allows him to empathize with the idea that Tonks is doing so, as well.



Ron's reductive approach to what he considers “female” emotions is especially laughable given how easily upset and angered he himself is.



The trio has made the trip to Hagrid's hut dozens of times, at all hours of the night. The fact that it's too dangerous to do so now reflects the general unease growing at Hogwarts, and the lack of security afforded by traditionally safe public spaces.



The subject turns to Slughorn, whom Harry still hasn't approached successfully. Struck by an idea, Ron suggests that Harry use his Felix Felicis to accomplish the task. Harry is reluctant to do so; he's had vague plans for the potion involving Ginny splitting up with Dean and Ron permitting them to date. When he doesn't say anything, Hermione briskly decides that the matter is settled.

As they get up to leave, two girls appear in the courtyard and Ron flinches, wary of Lavender; but it's actually two sisters whose younger brother has just been bitten by a werewolf and died in St. Mungo's. Hermione says "bleakly" that this sort of thing is the reason why Harry must acquire Slughorn's memory at all costs.

Harry heads to Potions, which is mostly empty due to the Apparition test; Slughorn tells them to brew him something "amusing." While looking across at Draco, who seems pale and sick, Harry thumbs through his book and decides to make an Elixir of Euphoria, which might put Slughorn in a mood to divulge his secrets. However, at the end of the lesson Slughorn hurries off before Harry can corner him. He returns upstairs to greet Hermione, who has passed the test, and Ron, who has failed after Splinching one eyebrow. Hermione comforts Ron over his failure.

After dinner, the trio climbs to the boys' dormitory and Harry retrieves his bottle of Felix Felicis from his trunk, drinking a tiny gulp. After a minute, a "sense of infinite opportunity" fills him and he knows he can accomplish anything. To Ron and Hermione's consternation, he announces his intention to visit Hagrid – he has a good feeling about attending Aragog's funeral. Pulling on the Invisibility Cloak, he confidently says that he knows what he's doing.

As the three emerge into the common room they meet Lavender, who only sees Ron and Hermione and immediately becomes upset. Harry breezes through the portrait hole, brushing past Dean and Ginny. Sounding annoyed, Ginny accuses Dean of trying to help her through the door and snaps that she can do it "perfectly well" by herself. In the entrance hall, Harry sees that Filch has forgotten to lock the front door. Impetuously deciding to walk to Hagrid's through the vegetable patch, although it's not on the way, he sees Slughorn gathering some herbs with Professor Sprout.

Harry's conviction that he needs a magic potion to facilitate a relationship with Ginny shows that he conceives of his feelings for her as shameful or unrealistic, rather than normal and actionable emotions.



Hermione's remark underlines the fact that Harry must use the potion to serve the community by acquiring the memory, rather than serving himself by pursuing Ginny. Learning to put aside his own emotions for a greater cause is another way in which Harry grows up over the course of the novel.



Draco's increasingly troubled appearance reflects his reluctance to complete the task he's been assigned and his anxiety over his dangerous position. While Harry is always alert for signs of wrongdoing in Draco, he doesn't pay attention to these signs, which point to the more humanizing and sympathetic aspects of Draco's character.



In a way, taking the Felix potion allows Harry to live out his fantasy of adulthood – a world in which he's extremely capable and always knows what to do. However, the unrealistically charmed evening demonstrates that such a life is impossible for even the most skilled wizard.



Harry decided to set aside his own desires and use the potion to secure Slughorn's memory, but he seems to be achieving both aims. By brushing against Ginny he's planted the seeds of discord in her relationship. And by remaining invisible to Lavender, he's facilitating the breakup that both Ron and Hermione desperately desire.



Harry decides to reveal himself and confides smoothly to Slughorn that he's on his way to comfort Hagrid over Aragog's recent death. Slughorn perks up at the mention of giant spiders, whose venom is hard to collect but extremely valuable. Harry invites him to the funeral and Slughorn scurries off to change his tie. Harry rushes to console a puffy-eyed Hagrid, who is astounded that Aragog's fellows have turned against him now that his leaders are dead.

As Hagrid leads Harry out to the pumpkin patch where he plans to bury Aragog, Slughorn arrives bursting with condolences and carrying several bottles of wine. They all proceed to the grave and Slughorn bends over to examine the spider; Harry hears the clink of glass bottles, but Hagrid is oblivious. As Hagrid proves too grief-stricken to say much in Aragog's honor, Slughorn steps up and improvises a flowery eulogy, which does much to raise Hagrid's spirits. They return inside, where Slughorn and Hagrid begin drinking and Harry quietly abstains.

Especially once he sees valuable supplies of unicorn hair hanging from the ceiling, Slughorn devotes himself to flattering Hagrid and exchanging tales of illegal dragon egg trading. Harry refills the bottles of wine until both of them are extremely drunk and singing old folk songs. After Hagrid falls asleep, Slughorn begins to question Harry about his parents' death and Harry recounts the details of the night in grim detail, especially his mother's brave decision to stand between him and Voldemort. Slughorn is upset and frightened, especially because Lily was one of his favorite pupils. Harry asks why, if he liked Lily so much, he won't help her son by giving him a memory.

Leaning close to Slughorn, Harry whispers that he is, in fact, the Chosen One, and that he needs the memory to kill Voldemort. Slughorn is very impressed and Harry presses his advantage, urging him to "be brave like my mother." Hesitantly, Slughorn says he's ashamed of his past behavior, but Harry says it would be an act of nobility to share the memory, absolving his previous misdeeds. Slowly, Slughorn brings his wand to his head and extracts a silver memory, which he collects in a small bottle. Giving it to Harry, he begs him not to think poorly of him in the future and falls asleep.

Slughorn's obvious interest in using Aragog's funeral for his own profit is evidence of his self-centered materialism; at the same time, these negative traits help Harry achieve what he needs. Slughorn's behavior both reveals his flaws and proves useful to Harry's cause.



In a way, this ceremony is a foil to Dumbledore's funeral at the end of the novel. Right now Harry is working under the headmaster's close tutelage and feels optimistic about succeeding in the tasks he's given. Conversely, at the end of the novel, Harry will feel starkly alone and unguided in the fight with Voldemort that faces him.



Slughorn's genuine regard for Lily is one of his good qualities – even if it expresses itself in a certain squeamishness about her brutal death. Harry is playing on both Slughorn's affection and cowardice to induce him to give up the memory. This shows that he's been able to read his emotions well enough to act on them, without getting caught up in moral judgments. At least while he's under the potion's influence, Harry is displaying heightened emotional maturity and stronger compassion for other characters' moral complexities.



As a final inducement, Harry holds out the prospect of personal redemption to Slughorn. Given his normally stringent moral judgments, it's probable that he doesn't quite believe that this act totally absolves the professor; rather, the potion is helping him intuit the most persuasive things to say. However, this moment shows him that believing in personal redemption can help people change themselves for the better and contribute to morally correct causes.



CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: HORCRUXES

By the time Harry arrives at Gryffindor Tower, the potion has mostly worn off and the Fat Lady refuses to let him in, saying that the password changed at midnight. However, Nearly Headless Nick is gliding by and informs Harry that Dumbledore has just returned to the castle from a mysterious errand. Harry sprints to Dumbledore's office and breathlessly presents the memory, earning a wide smile and an exclamation of praise from the headmaster.

Dumbledore empties the memory into the Pensieve and he and Harry find again find themselves in the young Slughorn's office, with Riddle and the other Slytherins sitting around him. Instead of blotting out his words in fog, Slughorn genially predicts that Tom Riddle will rise to Minister of Magic in twenty years – adding that with his “abilities,” it's clear that he comes from “decent Wizarding stock.”

After the other students leave, Riddle stays behind and asks Slughorn about [Horcruxes](#). The professor is taken aback, but Riddle perseveres, telling Slughorn that he's turning to him as a wise and knowledgeable wizard. Reluctantly, Slughorn explains that a Horcrux is a physical object in which a wizard stores part of their soul so that, even if he is attacked or killed, he won't die. However, existence as a bodiless soul is wretched, and the price for performing this magic is terrible: in order to split the soul, one has to commit a murder.

When Riddle presses for more information on the mechanics of this magic, Slughorn becomes irritated, asking if he looks like a person who has tried this. Riddle apologizes, but then proceeds to ask if it's possible to split one's soul more than once – for example, to create seven [Horcruxes](#). Clearly repenting of the entire conversation, Slughorn tells Riddle never to speak about this again, especially not to Dumbledore. The student turns away, his face full of sinister and “wild” delight.

Dumbledore and Harry exit the memory. Dumbledore says that this episode confirms his theories: that as a teenager, Voldemort had already figured out how to make himself immortal, perhaps many times over. Dumbledore reveals that four years ago, when Harry handed him Riddle's magic diary, he realized that since the object was starting to think for itself and give orders to humans, it had to be a piece of Voldemort's soul. At the same time, the carelessness with which Voldemort treated this [Horcrux](#) – allowing it to fall into the hands of a random student – convinced him that there had to be more in existence.

Harry is pleased to secure the memory not just because it helps in the fight against Voldemort, but because it earns him Dumbledore's praise. Moments like this display his growing dependence on the headmaster for parental guidance and validation – and hint at the emotional crisis he'll face after his mentor's death.



Even though Slughorn was testifying to muggle-born Lily's intelligence just moments ago, here he says that Riddle's talent is proof of his pureblood Wizarding ancestry (which, of course, he does not have). Vacillating between sympathetic and odious remarks, Slughorn forces Harry to confront the existence of people who can't be easily categorized as “good” or “bad.”



Riddle has adeptly exploited Slughorn's desire for praise and flattery to his advantage. Ironically, this is a very similar tactic to that which Harry took in persuading the professor to reveal information just now. Moments like this show the eerie similarity that exists between Voldemort's and Harry's behavior.



Even though Slughorn made a grave mistake in educating Riddle about Horcruxes, his memory is doing a great service right now – he's essentially revealed how many Horcruxes the villain has created. The novel argues that sometimes only people who have done bad deeds have the capacity to fix them.



Harry's experience fighting Riddle in the Chamber of Secrets was chilling, but now Dumbledore explains that it's part of an even more sinister plot, which Harry will have to confront in the future. For Harry, part of growing up is learning to see the events of his childhood not as individual escapades ending in certain triumph, but parts of a larger series of events with an uncertain outcome.



Harry asks why Voldemort didn't just use a Sorcerer's Stone to guarantee immortality, rather than this more drastic course. Dumbledore hypothesizes that the Dark wizard wouldn't want to be dependent on a potion – or the person who brewed it. He prefers to “operate alone,” and [Horcruxes](#) allow him to do that. Dumbledore is convinced that, just as Riddle suggested in the memory, Voldemort has split his soul into seven pieces, creating six Horcruxes. This is appalling to Harry, as the objects could be hidden anywhere in the world.

To cheer him up, Dumbledore points out that Harry has already destroyed one [Horcrux](#), the diary, while he has eliminated another – Marvolo's ring, which he found hidden in the ruins of the Gaunt house. It was in this endeavor that Dumbledore injured his hand, and only because of Professor Snape's timely magic did he not sustain more serious injuries.

Overwhelmed, Harry points out that any object could technically be a [Horcrux](#). But Dumbledore responds that Voldemort has always been attracted to powerful or significant objects, and that he's probably taken great care in selecting the ones for his Horcruxes. With a start, Harry realizes that Hepzibah's locket and cup are probably among them. Dumbledore further hypothesizes that having procured objects belonging to Hufflepuff and Slytherin, Voldemort would have sought two more from Ravenclaw and Gryffindor – although the only known relic of Gryffindor is the famous sword that belongs to Dumbledore.

Even if Voldemort did manage to procure something belonging to Ravenclaw, the remaining [Horcrux](#) remains unclear to Harry – until Dumbledore says he's long suspected that it's Nagini, Voldemort's prized snake, whom he always keeps close to him. Astutely, Harry guesses that when Dumbledore leaves the school he's been searching for Horcruxes, and the headmaster says he believes himself close to finding another one. Harry asks if he can come with him to destroy it, and to his surprise Dumbledore agrees. Harry is happy “not to hear words of caution and protection for once.”

Harry asks if Voldemort can tell when a [Horcrux](#) is destroyed, and Dumbledore responds that he's probably dehumanized himself too much to be able to tell. He only knew that the diary had been destroyed after questioning Lucius Malfoy, who smuggled it into Hogwarts without his permission, hoping to get an incriminating object off his hands.

Even though Voldemort and Harry share similar origins and sometimes behave in similar ways, Voldemort's instinct to isolate himself from others is what makes him fundamentally different than Harry. Voldemort believes that the Horcruxes will liberate him from reliance on others, but his lack of true friends will actually make him vulnerable to Harry, who operates with the support of a wide network.



Dumbledore's mention of Snape is a tacit affirmation of his trust in Snape – but it also points out that Snape knows the headmaster's deepest secrets, and could easily report them to the Death Eaters.



Dumbledore's earlier emphasis on the fact that the young Tom Riddle liked to collect “trophy” and felt intimately connected to Hogwarts now emerges as crucial in understanding his choice of Horcruxes. While Harry tends to think of feelings as inherently distinct from the fight against Voldemort, moments like this show that emotional intuition is important not just in his personal life but in solving this mystery.



Harry views Dumbledore's acquiescence to his request as affirmation of his desire to take a more adult role in the fight against Voldemort. However, his enthusiastic desire to accompany the professor shows how little he knows about such dangerous missions – in other words, how far from adult he actually is. Once he's been to retrieve a Horcrux, and has to contemplate doing so again without Dumbledore's guidance, he'll see this task not as a burden, not a thrill.



Even on a mechanical level, Voldemort's tendency to isolate himself from others makes him vulnerable to efforts to destroy his Horcruxes.



If all the [Horcruxes](#) are destroyed, Voldemort can be killed – but only by someone with “uncommon skill or power.” Discouraged, Harry says that he’s not the one who can do it. He’s unimpressed by Dumbledore’s response that Harry’s power “to love” is something Voldemort has never had, but the headmaster quietly insists that, given everything that has happened to Harry, this is a “great and remarkable” ability.

In fact, Dumbledore says that Harry’s ability to love is the power referenced in the prophecy. However, the prophecy is only important because Voldemort heard it and chose to kill the Potters, thus giving Harry both the desire for revenge and the special protection of love through his mother’s sacrifice. Like “tyrants everywhere,” Voldemort’s greatest fear is the person he has tried to “oppress.”

By trying to kill Harry, Voldemort actually paved the way for his own defeat. Dumbledore points out that, although Harry can see into Voldemort’s mind and understand Parseltongue, he’s never been “seduced” into following Voldemort – because of his grief for the parents that Voldemort killed. In short, he’s protected from and elevated above Voldemort by his ability to love, which has kept him “pure of heart,” despite the many dangers and temptations he has faced. Moreover, Voldemort doesn’t even understand Harry’s advantage because he’s never valued “the incomparable power of a soul that is untarnished and whole.”

Dumbledore says it’s not the prophecy that requires Harry to fight Voldemort – it’s his sense of injustice and all the terrible deeds he has witnessed in the past years, as well as the fact that Voldemort will never stop hunting him. Harry understands that Dumbledore is trying to impress upon him that he must not fear or evade battle with Voldemort, but rather meet him “with [his] head held high,” just as his parents once did.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR: SECTUMSEMPRA

During the next day’s Charms lesson, Harry relates the newest developments to Ron and Hermione. Ron is so impressed that he waves his wand in the air distractedly, making it snow. When he brushes the fake snow off Hermione’s shoulders Lavender bursts into angry tears. Ron admits that they split up the night before when she saw him and Hermione emerge from the dormitory. Moreover, Hermione reports that Ginny and Dean broke up after fighting about his habit of helping her through the portrait hole.

Even though Dumbledore has just shown Harry how crucial emotional intelligence is, and how important it is to be surrounded by loyal friends rather than fundamentally isolated, Harry still can’t believe that his ability to love others is a tactical advantage. Even as this characteristic distinguishes him from Voldemort, his reluctance to value it is reminiscent of the Dark Lord.



Even though Harry’s character is antithetical to Voldemort’s, Dumbledore sees it as stemming from the moments in which their lives intersected. His conception of the situation differs from Harry’s moral universe, in which “good” and “bad” people share no similarities and don’t affect each other’s character.



Although Dumbledore generally refrains from telling Harry how special he is, here he remarks on the genuine strength of character which is evident in Harry’s instinctive kindness and rejection of the preferential treatment he’s constantly offered. In a sense, the Horcruxes not only represent Voldemort’s increasing inhumanity, they highlight Harry’s contrasting goodness. It’s also interesting that Dumbledore considers Harry’s everyday good behavior evidence of a tactical advantage over Voldemort.



Although he perhaps knows that Harry is too young to feel comfortable taking on the burden of fighting Voldemort, Dumbledore is showing him a way to conceive of his adult duty without feeling overwhelmed by it. Unlike various other moments in which Harry feels cognizant of his increasing responsibilities, here he’s proud and enthusiastic about the path ahead.



Like the new sense of responsibility Harry derives from last night’s revelations, the increasing closeness between Ron and Hermione and Ginny’s new availability are moments in which the coming-of-age process is particularly evident. However, while these hints of romance – conventional aspects of growing up – are tender and unequivocally positive, Harry is much more ambivalent about taking on Voldemort – an unprecedented task for someone so young.



For the rest of the morning both Ron and Hermione are in excellent moods and oblivious to Harry's inner turmoil – now that Ginny's free it seems like he could make a move, but he feels that doing so would incite Ron's rightful anger. He's jolted out of his reverie when he encounters Katie Bell, finally recovered, in the common room. Now that she's back, the Quidditch team stands a chance of winning the cup; but Harry also takes her aside to ask if she can remember who gave her the cursed necklace. All she can remember from the fateful day is entering the women's bathroom at the Three Broomsticks.

Dean isn't pleased to give up his temporary position as Chaser, but Harry is glad to see his Quidditch team back together and flying well. Apparently unfazed by her recent breakup, Ginny amuses everyone by imitating Ron and Harry; Harry sustains several Bludger injuries because he's distracted by staring at her. Whenever he thinks about asking her out, he remembers Ron's face when he saw her kissing Dean; but he goes out of his way to talk to her and walk home from practice with her. He even considers asking Hermione for help, but doesn't want to deal with her self-satisfaction.

Besides, it's impossible to get any time alone with Ginny. Ahead of the upcoming match with Ravenclaw, Ron constantly wants to talk strategy and the entire house is interested and tense. Due to the defeat by Hufflepuff, the team has to win by three hundred points in order to win the Championship. For Harry, success or failure in the match has become "inextricably linked" with his feelings about Ginny, making him even more stressed.

One day, Harry is walking to dinner alone, checking the Marauder's Map for Draco's location. With a start, he sees that Draco is in the sixth floor boy's bathroom, alongside Moaning Myrtle. He remembers Myrtle's strange comments at their last encounter and hurries down to listen outside the door. He's shocked to see Myrtle crooning at Draco, who is leaning over a sink and crying, saying that "he'll kill me" soon if he doesn't succeed in his task. When Draco stands up, he sees Harry in the mirror.

Enraged, Draco draws his wand and the two begin fighting. Harry slips on the floor and Draco is about to use the Cruciatus curse when Harry employs the Prince's mysterious spell, Sectumsempra. Blood starts pouring from Draco's face and body and he falls back limply. Suddenly, Snape bursts into the room, shoves Harry aside, and bends over Draco's body to repair the damage. He picks up the boy and takes him to the hospital room, telling Harry furiously to await him in the bathroom.

Ginny just broke up with Dean because she doesn't like being "helped" and controlled by men. Her independent mindset should alert Harry to the fact that Ron has no business deciding who she dates. Contrasted with Ginny's confident feminism, Harry's inability to realize this fact emphasizes how much more emotionally mature than him she is.



Predicting that Hermione would be "self-satisfied" should he confide in her, Harry expresses a belief that his crush is a form of weakness, which, if revealed, would expose him to the ridicule of other people. It's interesting that he feels this way even as he sympathizes with Hermione's obvious feelings for Ron. Even as Harry is learning to identify with other people's problems, it's hard for him to extend the same compassion to himself.



Harry's conflation of the game and his crush gives the impression that his love life is itself a game, which he must either win or lose. This metaphor reminds the reader of the mind games Ron and Hermione played with each other all year, which gave neither of them any real satisfaction.



While Harry has never considered Draco's feelings or emotional vulnerability, Myrtle has given him an outlet for his feelings and thus learned more about his plans than anyone else. Showing Draco in a new light, this moment highlights the unique danger he faces and Harry's failure to interpret or consider the emotional context of his actions.



While Draco's vulnerability was evident just a moment earlier, his willingness to use such a strong curse is suggestive of his violent nature. Although Harry is hardly in a position to appreciate the contrast now, this moment shows that people can be cruel while also suffering relatable anxiety and sadness.



Shocked at what he's done, Harry obeys. When Snape returns, he coldly asks where Harry has learned this spell, and Harry lies that he found it in a library book. Although he tries to block his thoughts, he can tell that Snape is looking into his mind – especially when the professor orders him to retrieve all his schoolbooks. Harry runs to the dormitory and grabs Ron's copy of the Potions textbook; then he paces before the Room of Requirement until the door opens. He finds himself in a room “like a cathedral,” filled with objects hidden over the years by Hogwarts students. Passing by the Vanishing Cabinet into which Fred and George once stuffed a prefect, Harry hides his copy of *Advanced Potion-Making* in an innocuous cupboard.

Panting, Harry finally arrives at the bathroom and presents his book to Snape, who immediately discerns that Harry has swapped books when he sees Ron's name inside. Snape says that Harry is “a liar and a cheat” and gives him Saturday detention for the rest of the term – notwithstanding that the Quidditch final is this weekend. When she finds out about the incident, McGonagall reprimands Harry sternly and supports Snape's decision. By the time Harry finds Ron, Hermione, and Ginny in the common room, the whole school knows what he's done and the rest of the Quidditch team is furious with him.

Hermione feels vindicated, saying that the Half-Blood Prince must be a sinister character to come up with such spells. As she and Harry are arguing furiously, Ginny interrupts, pointing out that Draco was about to use an Unforgivable Curse and everyone should be glad Harry could defend himself. When the two girls start snapping at each other Ron is astonished but Harry feels “unbelievably cheerful” to be defended by Ginny.

However, by the time Harry arrives at detention on Saturday morning, he's regretting his actions and desperately wishing he were on the Quidditch pitch. He finds Snape's office piled with dusty boxes containing the records of old detentions, which Snape orders Harry to organize. He makes Harry start on the years when his father was at Hogwarts so that he can see all the detentions James received, saying sarcastically that even though his father is dead, it's nice that “a record of [his] great achievements remains.”

As Harry reads through his father's petty offenses he wonders how the match is going, especially with Ginny playing Seeker. When detention finally ends he runs up to the Gryffindor tower and opens the portrait door anxiously – to find all his friends in full celebration, having won the match. Ron waves the Quidditch Cup in the air and Ginny rushes towards Harry wearing a “hard, blazing look.” Without thinking about the consequences, Harry kisses her.

While Draco's immediate resort to a terrible curse is stunning, equally so is Harry's employment of a jinx whose result he doesn't know. Although this moment is a culmination of the antipathy existing between the two boys it's also indicative of their shared mindset. Both believe that the other's flaws are so great that any action against them is justified. In a sense, Harry's harsh moral judgments are what link him most to the people he despises.



Although Snape's punishment probably reflects his personal loathing of Harry as much as the boy's misdeeds, McGonagall's support of it teaches Harry an important lesson: that the misdeeds of his enemies do not justify misdeeds of his own. Like Dumbledore, she encourages him to meet cruelty not with equivalent actions but with dignity and justice.



Even though Harry knows he's done wrong, it's still good to have someone stick up for him no matter what – especially since, as an orphan, he hasn't always been able to count on unconditional support. That Ginny takes on this role foreshadows that she – like her brother and other important adults – will take on this kind of familial role in Harry's life.



No matter how much James Potter victimized Snape during their time at Hogwarts, it's pretty appalling to see him taking his resentment out on James' orphaned son. Snape is trying to strip away Harry's idealized picture of his father as a brave role model, but he's actually showing how far he himself is from being a moral example to follow.



Although Harry has been overthinking his feelings for Ginny throughout the novel, when he finally resolves them it's by discarding his preconceptions and acting from intuition. It's also important that Ginny seems to initiate the kiss by running towards him – she demonstrates her own agency in deciding whom she wants to date and how.



After a long time, Harry and Ginny finally move apart. The whole room is silent except for a few wolf-whistles. Harry sees Dean and Romilda looking angry, but looks around until he meets Ron's eyes. Ron seems stunned but finally gives "a tiny jerk of the head" that Harry interprets as his approval. With "the creature in his chest roaring in triumph," Harry opens the door again and leaves Gryffindor Tower for a long walk with Ginny.

Harry's desire for Ron's approval contrast with the previous moment, in which he was only concerned with Ginny's feelings and his own. Although Harry admires Ginny for her independence, he's still not totally convinced of her agency in determining the course of her own love life.



CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE: THE SEER OVERHEARD

For the next few weeks everyone gossips about Harry and Ginny's new romance, but Harry doesn't care – it's a nice change to find himself the center of attention for a good reason. To his amusement, Ginny reports that girls have been asking her if Harry has a hippogriff tattooed on his chest. She spreads a rumor that Ron has a Pygmy Puff tattoo, causing her brother to threaten to rescind his "permission" for her to date Harry. Ginny scoffs at this, saying that she doesn't need his permission for anything.

Ginny's ability to publicly date Harry seems to affirm her agency, as well as the general precept that women can and should determine the direction of their own romantic lives. However, it's important that the male perspectives have not changed. Ron sees himself as having given "permission" for the two to date, and Harry's peace of mind is contingent on that permission.



However, Harry and Ginny can't spend that much time together, as she has to study for her upcoming O.W.L. exams. One night when she's retired to the library, Hermione brings up the subject of Harry's Potions book, into whose origins she's been conducting research. She produces an old and tiny picture showing a "cross and sullen" Hogwarts student named Eileen Prince. Harry bursts out laughing at the idea that such an unprepossessing girl could have been the owner of a book; he tells Hermione that he "can just tell" it was a boy. When Hermione storms off, Ron says she's just mad at being outdone in Potions.

Harry's chauvinistic assertion that a girl – especially an unattractive girl – couldn't have written the potions book annotations is pretty dispiriting. Moreover, as the read will discover later, it's ill-considered. Moments like this, when Harry succumbs to prejudice, are usually moments in which his judgment proves faulty or he failed to make an important conclusion.



As Harry is mulling over the Prince's identity another student arrives with a letter summoning Harry to Dumbledore's office immediately. As he passes by the Room of Requirement, he encounters a drunken Professor Trelawney who has been trying unsuccessfully to enter the room and dispose of her empty sherry bottles. She remarks that she heard "whooping" in celebration in the room; when she called out, everything went back and she was thrust out of the room.

Even though Professor Trelawney is generally deemed weak and incompetent, here she provides important information. Although Harry isn't always a wholehearted listener (see his behavior above) his willingness to entertain the narratives of people who are usually ignored gives him important advantages.



Deducing that Draco is celebrating something inside the Room of Requirement, Harry persuades Trelawney to come with him and relate the story to Dumbledore. Lecturing Harry on her many talents, Trelawney recounts her initial interview with Dumbledore – during which, Harry already knows, she made the prophecy that changed his entire life. Without understanding the importance of her words, she mentions that the interview was interrupted by Severus Snape, who was caught eavesdropping at the door. Harry stops in shock, realizing that it was Snape who heard the prophecy and carried it to Voldemort, thus dooming his parents.

Harry leaves Professor Trelawney in the hallway barges into Dumbledore's office, intending to confront him. However, he's confounded by Dumbledore's announcement that he has found a [Horcrux](#) in a coastal cave, where Tom Riddle once tormented some children from his orphanage. He wants Harry to help him destroy it. Harry instantly agrees, but Dumbledore notices something is wrong and questions him – whereupon Harry bursts out that Dumbledore knew all along that Snape revealed the prophecy to Voldemort and still let him teach at the school all these years.

Quietly, Dumbledore tells Harry that Snape made a “terrible mistake” by working with the Death Eaters and revealing the prophecy; his role in James and Lily's death is the “greatest regret of his life.” Again, Harry questions Dumbledore's trust in Snape, pointing out that he's a very good liar and that he's probably up to something with Draco right now. Harry becomes more and more angry but Dumbledore cuts off his outburst, saying curtly that he doesn't want to discuss this anymore.

Dumbledore continues that if Harry accompanies him, he must be prepared to obey any order given – even if Dumbledore should tell Harry to leave him to die and save himself. Reluctantly, Harry agrees. He returns to the dormitory to fetch his Invisibility Cloak; while he's there he tells Ron and Hermione about Trelawney's encounter with Draco, asking them to keep track of his whereabouts. He gives them the Marauder's Map and the rest of his Felix Felicis potion.

Back in the office, Harry dons his cloak and leaves the castle with Dumbledore, who says he's going to Hogsmeade for a drink. They pass by the Three Broomsticks, where Madame Rosmerta greets Dumbledore kindly. Once they've reached a more secluded street Dumbledore grabs Harry's arm and he feels the unpleasant sensation of Apparition once again.

Throughout the year, Dumbledore has been treating Harry more and more like an adult – their most recent conference portrayed them as equal combatants, rather than teacher and student. However, in this moment Harry realizes how much Dumbledore is still concealing from him – in essence, the extent to which he's a player in a larger scheme orchestrated by the headmaster.



Harry doesn't know whether to feel betrayed by the information Dumbledore has withheld or pleased by the invitation he's extended. This reflects Harry's larger confusion about the nature of his relationship with Dumbledore – sometimes the professor is warm and supportive like a parent, but other times he's cool and distanced, giving the impression that he's interested in Harry primarily as a tool to defeat Voldemort.



Perhaps it's so hard for Harry to believe in personal redemption because Snape is the test case through which Dumbledore presents this precept. Accepting the possibility of character change doesn't just require him to extend compassion, it asks him to forgive someone who has grievously harmed his family.



By accompanying Dumbledore on this dangerous task, Harry is hoping to prove that he's now a capable adult, not a student. At the same time, Dumbledore's stipulation emphasizes the extent to which Harry is still a child, working under his protection rather than in equal cooperation with him.



The traditional fixtures of Hogwarts life – the walk into Hogsmeade and Madam Rosmerta's friendly face – are a jarring contrast with the dangerous mission Harry is now undertaking. This underscores the extent to which public life has been changed by Voldemort's rise.



CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX: THE CAVE

Harry finds himself standing on a rocky cliff lapped by dark waves. Dumbledore says this site is near a village Riddle once visited with his orphanage – the young boy brought two other children to this remote cave in order to terrorize them. Dumbledore looks across the water to a small cave, then slips down and swims toward it with surprising agility; Harry follows, swims into the cave mouth, and climbs out some stone steps into the cold air.

Dumbledore says that this might be the right place; he can tell that “it has known magic.” He examines the walls of the cave until he senses the existence of a concealed door; Harry is impressed to see him work simply by instinct and knowledge, rather than fancy incantations. After a few minutes of surveying the door, Dumbledore announces that they must make a “payment” in blood in order to enter. Although Harry offers to make the sacrifice Dumbledore cuts his own arm, splashes blood on the wall, and heals the injury.

A large arch appears in the wall and fades away, allowing Harry and Dumbledore to pass through and see an enormous black lake with a vague green light in the center, which they believe is the Horcrux. Careful not to step into the water, they walk around the lake, but there seems to be no good way of approaching the middle. Harry suggests trying a Summoning Charm and Dumbledore assents; but when Harry performs the spell something large springs out of the water and falls back down, filling him with dread of whatever is living in the lake.

Suddenly Dumbledore stops short, detecting something invisible in front of him. With a wave of his wand he reveals a large metal chain, which, when pulled, drags a small rowboat from the bottom of the lake. Dumbledore says that Voldemort must use this boat to check on his [Horcrux](#), and that as long as they’re inside it the creatures of the lake won’t guess that they’re not him. Harry and the headmaster cram inside the boat, which moves across the water without help.

Looking down, Harry sees a human hand in the water; shocked, he realizes that the lake is full of Inferi. Dumbledore is unsurprised when he points this out; he calmly says that bodies are only frightening because they remind people of the unknown. He says that once they have the [Horcrux](#), they will use fire to dispel the Inferi. Harry wishes he had said a proper farewell to his friends, especially Ginny.

Again, knowledge of Voldemort’s character and past has proved not just interesting but vital in understanding his current actions.



Harry measures his growing maturity by the mastery of different spells or his inclusion in different events – like this excursion. However, seeing Dumbledore’s consummate and inexplicable skill shows him that the process of becoming an adult is much more abstract and unpredictable than he previously believed.



It’s clear that Dumbledore knows this idea won’t work, but he lets Harry discover the fact by himself. In essence, the headmaster is using this night as a way to train Harry for the mission he’ll have to undertake alone in the future. This moment reaffirms Harry’s currently childlike relationship to Dumbledore, but hints at the adult role he’ll soon be forced to adopt.



In a sense, Dumbledore’s ability to accurately predict Voldemort’s actions stems from his close analysis of the villain’s habits and motivations. While Harry has long doubted that understanding Voldemort’s emotions would be of practical use, moments like this vindicate Dumbledore’s yearlong lessons.



Notably, Inferi are the very creatures mentioned in the Ministry leaflet Harry received at the beginning of the year. However, the government handout gave him no tactics to combat these sinister creatures, leaving him as vulnerable to them as if he’d never received it.



Reaching a tiny island, Harry and Dumbledore climb out of the boat and examine a stone basin full of glowing green liquid; the **Horcrux** is inside, but they can't scoop the potion away with their hands or use magic to vanish it. Dumbledore concludes that the only way to get the Horcrux is to drink the potion, and although Harry protests Dumbledore prepares to drink it, saying that even if he goes out of his mind Harry must force him to finish the potion.

Dumbledore conjures a goblet, dips it into the potion, and empties it. He seems unharmed but after several glasses stumbles against the basin. He seems to have forgotten where he is and begs in a frightened voice to stop drinking the potion. Even though he hates himself for doing it, Harry gently brings the glass to his lip and makes him drink it. The professor seems to be pleading with some invisible torturer, saying that he knows he did a bad thing, begging for some invisible people to be spared, and saying he wants to die.

After finishing the potion, Dumbledore faints briefly and then comes to his senses and begs for water. Harry finds himself unable to conjure water and is forced to dip the goblet into the icy lake; but this movement wakes the Inferi, who rise out of the water and start moving toward him. Harry tries to jinx them and even uses the Sectumsempra spell, but nothing stops their movements and they pick him up, carrying him slowly towards the water where he knows he'll drown. Suddenly, a ring of fire erupts around the island and the Inferi drop Harry, who sees Dumbledore standing pale but strong.

Dumbledore grabs a locket from the bottom of the stone basin and moves with Harry's help toward the boat, still surrounded by the protective fire. As soon as they reach the bank Dumbledore lets his arm fall and leans weakly against Harry, telling him that he's done well. Alarmed by the faintness of his voice, Harry spills his own blood to get past the rock wall and soothingly tells the professor that he will Apparate them back to Hogwarts. Dumbledore says he's not worried, because he's with Harry.

In choosing to drink the potion himself, Dumbledore is again affirming his own role as Harry's protector. At the same time, he gives a sense that he's sacrificing himself, which hints that Harry has an even greater importance in the fight against Voldemort than Dumbledore himself.



Up to this point, Dumbledore has been telling Harry what to do; but as the potion causes him to lose his mind, Harry has to take control of the mission. The fact that this shift happens artificially – by means of the strange potion – reflects Harry's feeling that he's entering adulthood abruptly and without adequate preparation.



Again, the presence of Inferi here recall the guidelines he received from the Ministry at the beginning of the novel and underscores the government's lack of involvement in this culminating mission. While Harry once saw himself fighting Voldemort from within the Ministry, now he's become disillusioned with them and taken a much more individualistic stance.



Dumbledore's comment is touching, and perhaps it bolsters Harry's confidence – even though he's not sure of himself, the professor sees him as a capable adult. At the same time, the sudden weakness in a heretofore almost invincible man creates an uneasy sense of vulnerability and danger.



CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN: THE LIGHTNING-STRUCK TOWER

Concentrating with all his might, Harry Apparates back to Hogsmeade with Dumbledore, who immediately sinks to the ground and tells Harry to find Professor Snape. He's about to run up to Hogwarts when Madam Rosmerta comes running out of her bar and alerts them to the fact that the Dark Mark has appeared over Hogwarts, meaning there are Death Eaters inside. Harry summons two brooms from the bar and he and a seemingly fortified Dumbledore head off toward the castle. Harry wonders if one of his friends has been hurt while patrolling the castle at his behest.

Muttering spells, Dumbledore undoes some of the school's protective enchantments, so that they can fly directly into the astronomy tower where the Dark Mark has appeared. Dumbledore orders Harry to summon Professor Snape and return to the tower. Under the Invisibility Cloak, he's about to run down the stairs when they hear footsteps; someone shouts the Expelliarmus charm and Harry feels himself become paralyzed. He realizes that Dumbledore has silently immobilized him and thus lost the chance to defend himself. The professor seems unfazed to find himself unarmed and facing Draco.

Full of bravado, Draco informs Dumbledore that he's smuggled Death Eaters into the school right under his nose. He continues that he has an important job to do, but seems hesitant and unsure. Unafraid, Dumbledore speaks calmly to him and tells him that although he knows about the "feeble attempts" he's been making all year with the necklace and the mead, he doesn't believe Draco is a killer. Still, he points out that if Draco really wants to kill him he should do it now, before members of the Order arrive. Draco snaps that he's not afraid, but he still doesn't do anything.

Conversationally, Dumbledore asks how Draco managed to smuggle in the Death Eaters. Draco says that he fixed the Vanishing Cabinet in the Room of Requirement, allowing people to pass from Borgin and Burkes directly into the school. Dumbledore commends Draco's cleverness and he seems to derive "courage and comfort" from the praise. Dumbledore says that he's ordered Professor Snape to spy on Draco all year; even when Draco sneeringly says that Snape is a double agent, Dumbledore reiterates his trust in Snape.

Dumbledore's order again underscores his trust in Snape – especially since even most Order members don't know about his quest to find the Horcruxes. Harry describes Madam Rosmerta – present now and when he left the castle – in terms of her kindness, but this impression will be challenged in the next chapters.



Dumbledore has treated Harry like an adult and even relied on him throughout this evening, but at the moment of true peril he makes sure the teenager is out of harm's way – even when doing so involves sacrificing his own advantage. Meanwhile, Draco's appearance on the balcony seems to confirm Harry's suspicions and vindicate his hatred of Draco.



While Dumbledore has been treating Harry more and more like an adult, he's doing everything possible to make Draco feel like a child – from revealing he's been watching him all year to joking about his own murder. Both students are on the threshold of adulthood, and their decision to conceive of themselves as boys or men affects the choices they'll make going forward.



The fact that Draco is pleased by Dumbledore's praise reflects the extent to which he's still a child, rather than an adult Death Eater. Although he's trying to distance himself from Dumbledore and drum up the courage to kill him, he can't help connecting with his "enemy," which shows Harry that Draco doesn't really want to carry out this task – rather, it was forced upon him.



Dumbledore asks how he managed to get the necklace to Katie, and Draco reveals that he has used the Imperius Curse on Madam Rosmerta. Dumbledore realizes aloud that she must have poisoned the mead as well, and she also alerted Draco that Dumbledore had left the school. Draco says that he got the idea for the mead after hearing “the Mudblood Granger” talking about Filch’s inability to detect poisonous potions. Dumbledore reprimands Draco for using the slur but goes on to ask if the Death Eaters have killed anyone and Draco says that they only cast the Dark Mark in order to lure Dumbledore to the tower; still, he thinks he saw a body in one of the corridors as he passed. Harry can hear fighting from below and wonders who has died.

Crisply, Dumbledore says he wants to discuss Draco’s “options,” since he doesn’t believe the boy actually wants to kill him. Draco shouts that he has to do it, or else Voldemort will kill his family. Sympathetically, Dumbledore says he understands this; he hasn’t confronted Draco all year because he knows that doing so would bring Voldemort’s wrath down on the boy. If Draco joins the right side, Dumbledore says, he can hide him and his mother and keep him from becoming a murderer.

Seemingly wavering, Draco almost drops his wand, but suddenly several Death Eaters storm onto the ramparts. They chortle at seeing Dumbledore so defenseless, but the headmaster greets them politely. Among them is Fenrir Greyback, and Dumbledore says he’s surprised to see that Draco invited such a bloodthirsty person to the place where his friends live. Seeming appalled, Draco protests that he didn’t know Fenrir was coming. Hearing members of the Order on the stairs, the older Death Eaters order Draco to get on with the murder, but he’s shaking too badly to move.

Suddenly Snape himself appears at the top of the stairs. The Death Eaters turn to him, wanting him to energize Draco. Meanwhile Dumbledore speaks Snape’s name in a soft tone, seeming to be begging for something. His face filled with “revulsion and hatred,” Snape raises his wand and kills Dumbledore with the Killing Curse. Dumbledore’s body flies into the air and then falls off the ramparts.

Just as Harry’s bias against Snape leads him to distrust the professor without much evidence, his predisposition to like Madam Rosmerta keeps him from ever suspecting her of wrongdoing – even though the novel remarks significantly on her whereabouts tonight and the day of Katie’s accident. Meanwhile, Dumbledore’s reprimand is a testament to his deep integrity – he refuses to sacrifice his ideals even in a moment of great danger – and perhaps a tactical ploy. By seeming unworried and dignified, he increases Draco’s respect for and fear of him.



Draco’s reason for joining the Death Eaters is now abundantly clear – although he’s a generally unpleasant person, he’s driven by the universally identifiable wish to save his family. While Harry is vindicated in his hunch that Draco was up to no good, he’s never tried to understand the pressures that led him into wrongdoing – and thus the methods by which his allegiance might be changed.



While Draco has been uneasy and almost upset to see Dumbledore helpless before him, the other Death Eaters take cruel pleasure in this scene. This contrast separates Draco from his comrades and shows that he’s not a stock villain, like they are; he’s a morally ambiguous character who’s been doomed by his personal circumstances. Noticing that Draco is “shaking,” even Harry can see how he’s misjudged his enemy.



Even as his villainy seems established, it’s important that his actions are phrased in a vague and morally neutral way; for example, although his face is filled with “revulsion and hatred,” the object of this emotion is never specified. It’s important to note that this moment is portrayed in such a way that many explanations are possible – including the unlikely one that will emerge in the next book.



CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT: FLIGHT OF THE PRINCE

Harry can't believe his eyes. He sees Snape grab Draco and lead him down the stairs before realizing that he can now move again. He runs down the stairs, determined to get to Dumbledore and unwilling to believe he's actually dead. The corridor is filled with dust and confusion and as Harry pushes through the fight he finds Fenrir Greyback tackling him, but manages to Stun the werewolf. Ahead of him, he sees Ginny fighting with a Death Eater, whom he jinxes as well. Ron, McGonagall, Lupin, and Tonks are fighting other Death Eaters, but Harry knows he needs to find Snape and Draco. He sprints past Neville who is lying on the floor but claims he's uninjured.

Pursued by two Death Eaters, Harry runs toward the entrance of the castle behind Snape and Draco. The doors have been blasted open and students are milling about in fright and confusion. Running onto the grounds, Harry sees fighting at Hagrid's cabin and knows the giant is trying to prevent Death Eaters from escaping. Running past Hagrid, he tries to jinx Snape, who blocks his attempts while Draco runs away. Harry calls Snape a coward but Snape says it's actually James who was the real coward.

Another Death Eater hits Harry with the Cruciatus Curse and he falls to the ground, screaming – only to hear Snape reminding them that Voldemort wants to kill Harry himself. The other Death Eaters leave and Harry staggers toward Snape, trying to use the Sectumsempra curse on him. Snape sends him flying backward and asks furiously how he dares to use his own spells against him – for in fact, he is the Half-Blood Prince. Harry calls Snape a coward again and, seeming to lose control, Snape hits him with a painful jinx. As Buckbeak the hippogriff starts to chase him, Snape runs just beyond the school's protective enchantments and Disapparates.

Hagrid's cottage is burning, but to Harry's relief the giant staggers out of it unharmed. Harry helps him put out the flames. Hagrid doesn't seem too perturbed by the break-in until, with difficulty, Harry announces that Snape has just killed Dumbledore. Even then Hagrid doesn't believe him, saying the headmaster must have ordered Snape to attack the school with the Death Eaters. As they walk towards the castle they see people gathering just under the Astronomy tower, where Harry knows Dumbledore's body must lie.

The protective way in which Snape treats Draco mirrors Dumbledore's treatment of Harry – showing that the villains and heroes are more closely connected than anyone (except the headmaster) would like to admit. Meanwhile, it's important that Ron and Neville are fighting alongside other order members, while in previous books the adults would have ushered them to safety. The authority figures in their lives have transitioned from protecting them to requiring their help.



The walls of Hogwarts have never been breached before, and the confused students remind the reader that this is a huge blow to the Wizarding community's confidence in its public spaces. Meanwhile, Snape's unprompted reference to James shows that he's just as bad as Harry in letting his pre-existing biases determine his conduct towards others.



While Harry hears Snape threatening him with death at Voldemort's hand, it's important to note that he effectively stops another Death Eater from torturing Harry. Moreover, Snape's revelation shows that Hermione was right in telling Harry to be wary of the potions book. As much as it's a tale of Harry's mounting distrust and suspicion, this novel is a chronicle of instances in which he trusts people or things that he shouldn't.



As Hagrid's unwillingness to believe the recent tragedy shows, Dumbledore's death isn't just a personal tragedy but a fundamental blow to the Wizarding world. His absence jeopardizes the stability of physical things like Hagrid's cottage or the Hogwarts walls, but perhaps more importantly, it dampens public morale and gives the impression that Voldemort is unstoppable.



When they reach the body, Hagrid howls in grief while Harry leans down to wipe some blood off the professor's mouth. It's almost impossible to believe that Dumbledore will never help or advise him again. Harry picks up the locket, which has fallen to the ground. Immediately, he sees that it's not as big as the one he saw in the Pensieve, and inside he finds a tiny note addressed to Voldemort, from someone named R.A.B. who announces that he has stolen the Horcrux and intends to destroy it. Harry has no idea who wrote the letter, but it's now obvious that Dumbledore's heroic efforts were in vain.

Harry makes this tender gesture without apparent forethought, which shows how accustomed he's becoming to the adult, protective role he's adopted in the last hours. However, the discovery about the locket's origins is a devastating blow. For him, one of the worst parts of growing up is realizing that hard work and bravery won't always be rewarded with success.



CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE: PHOENIX LAMENT

Ginny appears and gently leads Harry away from Dumbledore's body. She says that McGonagall has ordered everyone from the Order to assemble at the hospital wing. Although she reassures them that no one from their side has been killed, Greyback has bitten Bill. She says that they were helped by the Felix Felicis potion, which seemed to make the curses bounce off them.

In taking charge of Harry now, and in having fought alongside the order, Ginny quietly demonstrates that she too is becoming an adult, rather than the vulnerable girl her brother – and, to some extent, Harry – believe her to be.



In the hospital wing, they find Neville passed out and Ron, Hermione, Luna, Tonks, and Lupin gathered around Bill, whose face is maimed almost beyond recognition. Lupin says that Bill won't become a werewolf since Greyback wasn't transformed when biting him, but his wounds will be cursed and he might have some "wolfish characteristics."

While the presence of so many Order members lends this scene a sense of security and is a reminder of happy days at Grimmauld Place, Dumbledore's absence differentiates it starkly from the more positive era that preceded this novel.



Ron says hopefully that Dumbledore might know a cure, forcing Ginny to reveal that Dumbledore is dead. Devastated, Lupin staggers into a chair; Harry has never seen him "lose control" and feels as though he's watching something "indecent." They hear Dumbledore's phoenix singing a beautiful lament outside the castle.

Not only does Dumbledore's death rob Harry of his greatest protector, it triggers new displays of vulnerability in other adults around him. Moreover, Harry's feeling that this reaction is "indecent" reflects his belief that, like love, grief is a weakness best hidden from others.



Bloody from the battle, McGonagall enters the hospital to announce that Mr. Weasley and Mrs. Weasley are on their way. Again, Harry has to tell her that Snape killed Dumbledore. McGonagall is astonished, since the headmaster always implied he had an "ironclad reason" to trust Snape. Harry reveals that Snape passed Voldemort the information about the prophecy and then claimed to Dumbledore that this is his biggest regret. No one can understand why Dumbledore believed this, since Snape always hated Lily and James.

The fact that Harry is delivering this crucial information to other adults underscores the leadership position he's reluctantly adopting. Meanwhile, the night's events cause the group to lose faith in Dumbledore's decision-making process, rather than investigate his reasons for trusting Snape more deeply.



McGonagall says that the whole thing is her fault, relating that she was patrolling the halls with other members of the Order when the Death Eaters arrived and she summoned Snape for extra help. Harry explains that they used the Vanishing Cabinet to enter the castle. Ron and Ginny admit that, although they were tracking Draco on the map, he managed to get past them, even using some of Fred and George's Instant Darkness Powder to incapacitate them while the Death Eaters rushed into the castle.

Meanwhile, Hermione says that she and Luna were lurking outside Snape's office when Flitwick burst inside to alert him about the Death Eaters. Snape came rushing out of the office and ordered Hermione to take care of Flitwick, who had collapsed; but now it's obvious that Snape Stupefied Flitwick in order to distract them.

Ron, Ginny, and the other Order members discuss the details of the battle, while Harry imagines Snape running towards the battlements. When he emerged from the tower, none of the Order members stopped him because they thought he was being pursued by Death Eaters. Harry wonders what will become of Dumbledore's body.

Mr. Weasley and Mrs. Weasley burst into the hospital ward, followed by Fleur. Sobbing over her son, Mrs. Weasley starts dabbing at his wounds. When she sobs out that Bill "was going" to be married, Fleur interrupts loudly, asking if she wished – or hoped – that Fleur would abandon him because of his wounds. Tossing her hair, Fleur proclaims that she is "good-looking enough for both of us" and pushes Mrs. Weasley aside to tend to Bill herself. After a long silence, Mrs. Weasley offers to lend her the family's ancient goblin-made tiara for the wedding. Suddenly, both women begin crying and hugging each other.

Seeing this, Tonks grabs Lupin by his robes and says it doesn't matter to her that he's a werewolf, just as Fleur doesn't care about Bill's bites. Suddenly, it becomes clear to Harry why Tonks has been so low and why her Patronus has changed. Looking at the floor, Lupin protests that he is too old and poor for her and this isn't the moment to discuss such things. Sternly, McGonagall points out that Dumbledore would have been happy to know that "there was a little more love in the world."

Even though almost everyone was on alert the night of the breach, they all feel that they've been tricked. This reflects a sense that they're not being attacked by outside forces so much as betrayed by formerly trustworthy people and failed by the previously formidable defenses of Hogwarts. The atmosphere of paranoia creeping through the Wizarding world has at last penetrated its safest places.



While Snape hoodwinked Hermione and Luna and prevented them from stopping him, he also kept them from joining the battle, and thus out of harm's way.



Harry's fragmented thoughts at this point emphasize his own grief, which he's either unable or embarrassed to articulate.



In her first appearances, Fleur ranked among the novel's unpleasant characters. However, her actions now are a testament to the enduring nature of love, forcing the others to reconsider their assessment of her as superficial and snobby. The emotional reconciliation between the two women shows that changing one's mind doesn't indicate weakness or lack of integrity; rather, it's sometimes the brave and noble thing to do.



Even though they're in the middle of the crisis, many of the characters feel called to address problems in their love lives. This impulse shows that romance isn't ancillary to the fight against Voldemort; rather, the freedom to love is exactly the reason they've embarked on this battle.



Hagrid comes into the ward, announcing that he's moved Dumbledore's body and Slughorn has informed the Ministry of the disaster. Professor McGonagall beckons to Harry and brings him into Dumbledore's office – which now belongs to her. It's strange to see it looking exactly as usual. McGonagall wants to know what Harry and Dumbledore were doing together, but Harry refuses to tell her; he just warns her that Madam Rosmerta is under the Imperius Curse.

Along with Hagrid, the three other Heads of House arrive in the office. McGonagall asks for their opinions on the future of the school, wondering if it's safe to stay open. Professor Sprout says staunchly that Dumbledore would want things to go on as before, while Slughorn argues that after this no parents will want their children to return. Remarking kindly that Dumbledore always valued his views, McGonagall solicits Hagrid's thoughts as well. The giant says that Hogwarts has always been his home and he'll stay to take care of the school. The one thing on which everyone agrees is that Dumbledore's funeral must take place at Hogwarts and the students should stay to say goodbye.

From the window, McGonagall sees Scrimgeour arriving with his entourage; not wanting to see the Minister, Harry ducks out and returns to Gryffindor Tower, which is packed with people. Without talking to anyone, Harry goes upstairs to find Ron and tells him that he didn't even find a real [Horcrux](#). He sows him the fake locket and Ron wonders who wrote the note. Harry feels that he'll never be curious about things like that again. Outside, the phoenix's lament stops and Harry knows he has forsaken the school, just as Dumbledore has left Harry.

CHAPTER THIRTY: THE WHITE TOMB

While some parents take their children home in the next few days, most stay until the funeral. Important wizards from across the world arrive, as well as large delegations from the Ministry. Harry, Ron, Hermione and Ginny spend all their time together in the fine summer weather, which seems to “mock” their grief. Every day they visit Bill, who seems largely unchanged by his bite except for a new preference for rare steaks. Fleur says it's good he's marrying her, as the British always overcook their meat.

At night, Hermione reads the *Prophet* while Ron asks, as usual, if anyone they know has died. While there have been no new deaths Hermione reports that she's found some important information in the library this morning. Harry hopes it's about the [Horcruxes](#), which he can't stop thinking about even when he's asleep.

Besides being disillusioned with the Ministry, Harry feels that he shouldn't even involve other Order members in his quest. In creating an individualistic and uniquely competent heroine, Rowling wishfully conjures up a fantastical solution to a political crisis that, in the real world, cannot be resolved singlehandedly.



Rather than abusing her new position of power, McGonagall takes care to include other faculty members in important decisions – even Hagrid, who is often dismissed. While her behavior mirrors Harry's usual tendency to work collaboratively, it contrasts starkly with his new feeling that he needs to operate alone – hinting that the night's events are forcing Harry to fundamentally change his outlook and plans.



Growing up should inspire a new zest for life and the possibilities of the adult world. However, although Harry is more a man than ever before he seems to have lost all feeling except a sense of duty. This moment emphasizes that, for him, coming of age is not a celebratory thing, but a deeply traumatic and destabilizing process.



The arrival of Ministry delegates and wizards from around the world recalls the Triwizard Tournament, the last Wizarding event to be held at Hogwarts. However, while the Tournament was supposed to represent international cohesion and strength, the current gathering reflects anxiety and instability now widespread in the same society, showing how much change has occurred in the past years.



Harry's inability to stop focusing on the Horcruxes reflects both his central role in fighting Voldemort and the extent to which he's overwhelmed and lonely in this role.



Instead, she says “tentatively” that she was right about the Half-Blood Prince. After doing some more research she found that Eileen Prince grew up to become Snape’s mother. Since his father was a Muggle, Snape took his mother’s name when coming up with a new identity for himself. Harry reflects that, although he’s been unable to stop thinking about Dumbledore’s mistaken trust in Snape, Hermione has just reminded him that he “had been taken in just the same.”

Harry bitterly reflects that he should’ve shown the book to Dumbledore, who might have recognized Snape’s writing and been alerted to his evil nature. Hermione says quietly that “evil” is too strong a word to describe Snape and everyone falls silent, thinking about the funeral the next morning. Harry wonders if Dumbledore’s death will feel more real once his body has been buried.

The next day, Harry finds the entire student body glumly eating breakfast in the Great Hall, joined by Rufus Scrimgeour. Looking at the Slytherin table, Harry wonders where Draco is now – he can still remember his fear and hesitancy on the Astronomy tower, and doesn’t believe he would actually have killed Dumbledore. Right now, Voldemort might be forcing him to do other terrible things.

At McGonagall’s signal, everyone proceeds out of the castle towards the lake, where many witches and wizards are already gathered. Harry sees Luna helping Neville into a chair and feels intense gratitude to them for helping Ron and Hermione on the night of the attack. Looking at all the important people from the Ministry, Harry wonders if any of them feel true grief for Dumbledore’s death. Suddenly a mournful song breaks out and Ginny directs Harry’s attention to the lake where a group of merpeople are singing. Hagrid walks up the aisle between the chairs, carrying Dumbledore’s body wrapped in a shroud.

A small man in black robes gives a long eulogy to which Harry doesn’t listen. Instead, he watches the merpeople and remembers seeing Dumbledore crouch down to speak to them in their own language. As he looks toward the forest, where the centaurs have assembled to pay their respects, he’s hit “without warning” by the “dreadful truth” that Dumbledore really is gone.

This is an important moment for Harry. Previously, he’s judged other people for faults or feelings that he himself possesses. Now, his awareness of his own fallibility allows him to identify with and pardon the weaknesses of others – although in this case, the “other” is a person he already respects and admires.



In refusing to categorize Snape as “evil,” despite his recent actions, Hermione emerges as the inheritor of Dumbledore’s belief in moral complexity and personal redemption. From now on, it’s she who will compel Harry to remember and act on these precepts.



Harry has performed this ritual thousands of times, but Draco’s eerie absence reminds him how much his world has shifted, and reminds him that his school days as he knows them are over.



Often disregarded yet unstinting in their loyalty and bravery, Neville and Luna contrast starkly with the important people who seem to manifest no real emotion over Dumbledore’s death. This moment strengthens the novel’s long-running argument that material success is rarely indicative of character or morals. It also shows that Harry’s distrust of the Ministry is still strong, and will govern his path forward.



It’s important that Harry remembers Dumbledore communicating with the merpeople and the centaurs. These groups are often marginalized (for example, they’re not formally included in the funeral), and Dumbledore’s actions represent his inclusive vision for the Wizarding world, which distinguishes him not only from Voldemort, but also from a society which often tacitly accepts these inequalities.



Harry remembers the advice Dumbledore gave him during his first year: that it's always important to fight against evil, even though it can only be "kept at bay" and never "eradicated." He thinks about all the people, from his parents to Sirius and Dumbledore, who were "determined to protect him" but inevitably died in his defense. It seems like a foolish illusion to have ever thought that he could feel safe under the protection of a parent or any adult. He feels "more alone than he had ever been before." When the man stops speaking, Dumbledore's body spontaneously bursts into flames, vanishes, and is replaced by a white marble tomb.

While Hermione is still crying and Ron looks to be on the verge of tears, Ginny is wearing the same "blazing look" Harry remembers from the moment he first kissed her. Bracing himself, Harry tells Ginny that they can no longer be together; he has to fight Voldemort alone, and the Dark wizard might hurt Ginny in order to get to him.

Ginny says that she doesn't care about this possibility, and ruefully reflects that she's always hoped to be with him. Even when she thought it would never happen, Hermione advised her to date other people so she could feel more relaxed around Harry. Harry says that he should have asked her out sooner so they could have more time together. Almost laughing, Ginny says she wouldn't like him so much if he wasn't determined to hunt down Voldemort.

Seeing Ron stroking Hermione's hair while she cries, Harry gets up and walks away. To his displeasure, Scrimgeour soon flags him down. Harry brusquely cuts off his condolences, asking what he wants; Scrimgeour demands to know what Dumbledore and Harry were doing the night of his death, and Harry refuses to tell. Scrimgeour reiterates his request that Harry ally himself with the Ministry, but Harry just asks if they've released Stan Shunpike yet, causing Scrimgeour to turn purple. Again, Harry affirms that he's "Dumbledore's man through and through."

As Scrimgeour stalks off, Ron and Hermione hurry towards Harry. Ron is begging Hermione to let him punch Percy, and she almost laughs as she refuses. Looking up at the castle, Hermione reflects sadly that it might not even be open next year. Harry says that even if it doesn't close, he's not returning: he has to find the rest of the [Horcruxes](#) and fight Voldemort, just as Dumbledore wanted.

Harry's gradual loss of faith in the ability of adults to protect him culminates in this moment, in which he reframes his life as a series of defeats, each of which demonstrates his own vulnerability. For Harry, growing up doesn't mean joining the ranks of adults but distancing himself from them. It's interesting that he experiences this lonely epiphany within Hogwarts, the place that gave him friendship and community.



Even though he's grown significantly throughout the novel, Harry still considers his love for Ginny a weakness and sees her as requiring protections. In contrast, her "blazing look" suggests she understands that love persists, no matter the political circumstances.



While Harry is usually embarrassed to talk about his feelings, Ginny does so with candor, showing her superior emotional maturity. Even though Harry claims he's acting in her best interest, it's clear that she's thought things out more than he has.



While Harry and Ginny are parting, Ron and Hermione are closer than ever – their physical gestures not only foreshadow a future romance but signal the strength of their friendship as a trio. Meanwhile, Harry's reference to Stan Shunpike reiterates the Ministry's incompetence and irresponsibility in handling Voldemort – flaws which are even more frightening now that Dumbledore is dead and unable to lead the fight on his own.



Harry's life – and the structure of the novels – have always been defined by going to Hogwarts. Deciding to leave school forever marks a true departure from previous eras and the concrete beginning of the trio's adulthood.



After a moment of silence, Ron says quietly that he and Hermione will accompany him. Harry is startled, not having expected them to risk themselves, but Hermione says that they know what they're doing and will be with him whatever happens.

Ron points out that before they set off they have to return to the Burrow once more, for Bill and Fleur's wedding. Harry concurs. It seems almost incomprehensible that weddings can occur in this new world. Still, even though he dreads the "dark and twisting path" and final fight with Voldemort that lies ahead, it raises his spirits to know that there's still "one last golden day of peace left to enjoy with Ron and Hermione."

Ron's immediate show of support is a touching affirmation of the friendship that has always sustained Harry, and on which he will rely even after his confidence in institutions and governments fails.



Even though Voldemort seems more powerful than ever, the one thing that can push him from Harry's mind is the security he derives from his friendships and his familial connection with the Weasleys. The traits that most differentiate Harry from Voldemort are also those that will enable him to face down the villain in the final installment of the series.



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